—Railways, postages—in a word, all the numerous facilities of the age—have almost annihilated distance, and, as a natural result, caused an individual trade between country customers and London establishments. Those who do not visit town, so as to select and purchase directly, send for patterns from which they can give their orders. But as all apparent advantages on the one hand have more or less their corresponding drawbacks, so this system is not without its bane. Pushing tradesmen make a market by offering goods at lower rates than they can possibly be sold at to realise a fair profit. The bait traps the unreflective, and the result is that the receipts *en masse* are not equal to the tempting samples. There is no new invention in this; it has been practised in wholesale merchandise and by candidates for contracts, as the proverb hath it, since there were hills and valleys. But we grieve to add it is sometimes resorted to by those whom one would credit for more integrity. Ladies, therefore, need exercise caution, and place confidence only in houses of old-established fame, for rapidly-made businesses are not generally reliable. And to what does this assertion amount more than to the fact that nothing great can be effected not only without labour but without time, and that Rome was not built, as the old saying says, in a day? Messrs. Jay, of Regent-street, whose name is well known amongst the few on the list of *bonâ fide* establishments in the metropolis, are about to adopt a plan (which will be registered) for assisting country ladies in choosing for themselves London fashions and fabrics. And their customers may rest assured that they will thus be enabled to obtain goods of every quality, both low and high priced, at the most reasonable terms—that is, the terms of small profits for quick returns—and that they may firmly rely upon the thoroughly corresponding character of samples and supplies.—From the *Court Journal*, April 27, 1867.

# THE SPANISH MOTHER.

A NOVEL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY

THE HON. MRS. CHARLES E. PETRE.

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# THE SPANISH MOTHER.

## CHAPTER I.

"Death lies on her like an untimely frost!
Upon the sweetest flower of all the field."

SHAKESPEARE.

### THE LAST WISH.

"HERBERT dear, I am glad you have returned, for I feel I am sinking fast, and have not long to be with you here," said Lady Herbert, to her husband, as with a soft step and deep anxiety in his face, he approached her bed.

"Hush, hush, Rose! say not such cruel words; the doctors assure me you are better, and they yet hope to pull you through."

But though he sought to give a cheerful hopeful tone to his voice and manner, it was in vain he sought to conceal the truth from himself—his bride, his baby wife was quickly passing away.

"No, Herbert, no; I feel it is not so. God's will be done; but dear husband guard and watch over my children, my boy especially—and when you marry again—"

"Hush, Rose; do not trifle with my feelings, you know that can never be," interrupted Herbert.

"Do not contradict or interrupt me, dear Herbert; I have so little strength left. I like to think matrimony has been pleasing enough to you to induce you to try it again,

and I know it should be so—but dearest, let your choice be of one religiously brought up, your equal in birth, of the same religion, and above all of your own seeking, not you hers."

"Rose, darling, I never yet disregarded your advice, and now above all will it be sacred to me, but having told me all you wish, take your composing draught try and sleep and wake stronger," said Herbert, giving her the draught, which was left ready by her bed.

"Thanks dear, thanks; but do not talk of sleep, dear, I am about to take a very long one, and have but a short time to prepare for so fearful an ordeal; send good Mr. Grey to me, and keep near that you may join me in my last earthly prayers!"

The poor sorrowing husband had above all been warned to cause his wife no excitement,

no discussions, no contradictions, and to control his grief in her presence. He therefore gave her but one fond and gentle kiss on those rosebud lips so soon to be cold and white as marble, and silently withdrew; he sent the old chaplain to her room, and throwing himself on the couch in the next wept, as he had probably never wept since the days of his boyhood. He was soon summoned by the priest to return and join in the last prayers for the dying, and assist at the departure of a Christian soul for the realms of bliss.

Lady Rose had now become much weaker and was rapidly going. The nurse approached, and she made signs she wished to see the babies.

When they were brought to her she drew her husband near her, begged him once more to guard and cherish them, and putting the

boy into his arms said, "I charge you, watch over him and bring him up for God!"

Soon after she became insensible, and Herbert presently felt he was a widower.

It is curious, but so it is, that nature seems somehow to partake of our griefs, and to put on mourning as we do ourselves, we no doubt invest it with sorrow from the reflection of our own. The hall and park of Thornbury where the above sad scene took place was no exception.

It was beautifully situated in one of the prettiest parts of Devonshire, and usually looked bright and cheerful, situated on rising ground, surrounded by large wide handsome terraces, and Italian gardens, which when not well filled with bright and various colored flowers, were strewn with those mineral stones

they now make in all sorts of colours for the winter flower beds.

The trees beyond in the park were fine old timber of all sorts growing luxuriantly, and this year covered with the richest and fullest foliage.

It was the middle of August, all had been looking cheery, healthy, and prosperous up to three days before, when the weather had become stormy, wet, and had settled down into a gloom, and a raw mist that seemed to sympathize with sorrow, forgetting that the harvest was not all in safely yet.

Thornbury Hall was to-day a sad contrast to its usual pleasant smiling appearance.

The blinds were all drawn down, no one was to be seen going in or out excepting now and then a fly drove up from the station, and

a solitary solemn man in black passed noiselessly into the house, or again a pompous official looking individual with a blue bag arrived.

The lawyer and the undertaker, the epilogues of death. Every sound seemed hushed, the gusts of fitful Autumn wind were lulled, the very deer in the park had lain down as if in awe; now and then a bird passed swiftly by them, so near the ground and in that peculiar manner which prognosticates bad weather, no one seemed to heed it.

What did it all mean?

That dread visitor Death had entered this happy and usually bright home, and seemed in passing to have struck terror into all, though he chose as his victim for the moment but one, the fair mistress of its halls, the beloved, the idolized wife of the master.

Lord Vere Herbert had, at an early age inherited a fine estate, and a beautiful old house built in the ornamental Italian style of the Medici period, its castellated balustrade cut in the form of letters, which spelt out a welcome or a scriptural proverb.

The rooms finely proportioned and beautifully decorated.

His father had died when Vere was very young, and the boy grew up there under his mother's care, and made it his home with her when he left Oxford.

He was tall, with fine, well made limbs, as a French girl once described it, "*très bien jambè.*" His hair and eyelashes dark, his eyes of soft clear blue, with an expression at once loving and loveable; his tastes were of the real English gentleman, hunting, driving, cricketing, and shooting. Racing had had

its fascinations for him, and might have done him mischief; but one dreadful example of gambling he witnessed seemed to have made an impression nothing could efface, and he would never even take a lady's bet at a race.

Whilst he was at Oxford he saw many fortunes lost, many names disgraced, many cut off in the midst of a foolish or a wicked career; but one amongst them, a certain George Witmore, was his especial favourite and friend. He really cared to read, and rather avoided the very fast and loud lot; they did not suit him, and this George Witmore, somewhat his junior, but still a former schoolfellow, was especially put under his care by his own as well as by Witmore's mother; she was a widow with nothing to think of, no one to love but her boy, and she gave up every luxury and personal enjoyment to be

able to afford him an Eton and an Oxford education.

Herbert introduced Witmore to a good, steady lot of the best Oxford men, and tried to keep him to study and reasonable hours, but it did not last long. One fatal day he made acquaintance with and took an immense fancy to Henry Courtney, whose purse was long, his tastes low, his ideas all horsey, and his education just what enabled him to jog along without coming to any dire disgrace; but who had almost forgotten his mother's lessons in reading for want of ever looking into a book, and her lessons in Christianity for want of ever practising any. His sole amusement was racing: his pet companions the members of the ring and the jockies. Such seemed to be the fascination of this man over Witmore that before they had known each

other six months Vere Herbert was shunned—his advice ridiculed—and he saw his friend going gradually each day lower and lower down the hill. At last Henry Courtney was expelled from Oxford, Herbert hoped to save Witmore yet, but it was too late. Witmore had by degrees involved himself in money matters with every money lender, every tradesman in the place, and though he got on for the time on Courtney's bills, they got blown upon, and arrest and disgrace threatened him on every side. He drowned thought in drink, and was every day expected to be rusticated, if not expelled.

One evening Herbert was summoned by a messenger from the Crown Hotel to come immediately and see a friend who was dying.

When he arrived sad indeed was the scene. On a couch lay his friend George Witmore,

covered with blood, insensible, but groaning; and when ever he made an attempt to speak it was to utter some imprecation—some horrid oath.

His first impulse was to telegraph for the poor mother, but his second seemed to say, no —spare her a sight so dreadful, a recollection of her son so awful.

It appeared that after playing high and losing all he possessed, he got to high words, and next to blows with some low man he was playing with. Being more than half tipsy, he was more easily disabled; then rushing into the coffee room he endeavoured to kill himself with a small pocket revolver; firing twice he fell on the couch where he now lay, and where, in spite of all the doctor's care, he soon died, a victim of vice, and a warning for ever to Lord Vere Herbert.

But to return to Thornbury. Lord Herbert lived with his mother between his Oxford terms until he came of age. But on that day he met for the first time the young and lovely Rose Trevanion, and as Racine says:

> Ils ont beau se cacher; l'amour le plus discret
> Laisse par quelque marque echapper son secret.

From that day his mother felt Lord Herbert's fate was sealed. He had found the missing link in his chain of life, and like a true mother she made sure none could resist her son, so the thing would be; she felt no regret. In his position matrimony must be his safeguard against selfishness, as well as immorality, and she liked his choice.

Rose Trevanion was an orphan, brought up most carefully by an uncle and aunt. The uncle had died some two years back, and left the estates to Rose, but that was to be kept a

secret, confided only to the aunt, who promised not to tell till she should be wooed and won by someone worthy of her, when all would be given up to her, and the aunt retire to her own county. The estates joined those of Lord Herbert.

So the marriage took place with all the usual amount of festivities—bell ringing, health drinking, choral services, school children dressed in white, spreading a carpet of roses without thorns for the bride to tread on, followed, after the departure of the happy pair, by tenants feasting, doles and clothing to the poor on both estates, and everything that could bespeak joy, love, and plenty to all around—well presided over by the Dowager Lady Herbert and Mrs Trevanion.

"I really think we have beaten the old proverb about true love and its roughness," said

Mrs Trevanion to Lady Herbert, as they went to their rooms that evening, after an eventful happy day, thoroughly tired out.

"God grant it may be so," answered she. "My Vere has always been a good son, and will, I am sure, know how to appreciate your darling. Good-night."

Alas! the proverb would come, true love run its course smoothly enough indeed for a year, but then came anxieties. A short cough, a constant languor, a fanciful irritability, and many other signs of decline, showed themselves in Lady Vere Herbert. Vere shut his eyes, love lent him his blindness, it was nothing more than usual, nothing more than all Eve's daughters are heirs to. When the baby was born they would go away for a change. All would be bright and well again, and so when that most arbitary of

monarchs, Death, came and claimed his subject, the one who ought to have been most prepared for it, the one on whom the robbery fell the heaviest, that one was the most incredulous, the least aware of the real danger, the one who persisted they were unnecessarily nervous.

Thus on that sad day when Lord Herbert found he must really part from his beloved Rose, must say one long farewell to his bride, he was crushed and stunned as if she had been torn from him in perfect health and beauty, and his grief was fearful to see. He seemed to have lost all control of himself the moment she was gone, and until the arrival of his mother no one ventured to go near him.

The only solace of his grief seemed to be to remain in the room with the mortal remains

of his beloved, and gaze upon her marble features and kiss her cold lips. The twins he could not bear to look at, they seemed the guilty cause of his sorrow, the robbers of his happiness and of her precious life, and yet he could not look at them without remembering her anxiety, especially for her son, her solemn injunction to watch over him.

What a lesson does those few days read us that intervene between the death and funeral of one dear to us. How clearly do we see then the truth of what death makes of us. Each one of us may leave behind one dearer than the rest who will still care to hang about our room and watch by our coffin, but the generality avoid the house, or if they must be in it, at least the room where the cold inanimate image lies. The servants, who as long as there is any breath, any being in their master

or mistress, will serve them many times with surprising duration and care, with attention and feeling that seems something better than bought with wages; the very instant death comes seem panic-stricken, will not be left alone, are seized with a senseless fear; the more distant relations eagerly enquire for the day of the funeral and hope it will be fixed soon, as they cannot appear in society till that day is over, everything is done to hurry it on, and at last to the relief of every one all is arranged, and the melancholy ceremony is over, and all go home. The mourners go home too, but then they begin to realise that indeed they are alone, and so deeply did Lord Herbert feel this that nothing seemed to calm or cheer him. He settled down in such a state of morbid melancholy, that his mother became quite alarmed. After a month of vain

endeavours to make him rouse himself and see to something on his estate, about the house, or go on with some of his improvements which he had taken so much interest in with Rose by his side, his mother had ceased to take any notice of it.

One day he took her by surprise, informing her he had made arrangements for going abroad.

He disliked the country itself where he had lost his Rose, he felt he should never get any better without an entire change, and he had succeeded in getting his old friend Mr. Roderick to come and stay at the Vicarage, so that he would superintend everything for him, his only difficulty was the children; would his mother consent to live at Thornbury, and take charge of them till his return, an indefinite period. The Dowager Lady

Herbert willingly consented to so reasonable a plan.

A week after, Lord Vere wishing his mother good-night, said—

"Good-bye, dear mother, I shall be gone before you are down to-morrow. You must let me slip quietly off, and I will promise to write often, very often."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HANDSOME FOREIGNER.

About three years after the melancholy event recorded in our last at Thornbury, in one of the most fashionable hotels at Cannes, a lady sat playing with a curly headed boy of a year old. She spoke English, though with a slightly foreign accent, and her countenance was not English, though something in her figure, her general appearance, and above all

her laugh, seemed to be Saxon. She had long almond shaped eyes, bright as stars, of that peculiar liquid blue so often seen amongst the Irish, so seldom seen out of Great Britain, but they were set in the darkest black eyelashes and eyebrows that should have been pleasing, so neatly were they drawn by nature's hand, had it not been for their peculiar shape near the nose, where they nearly met and gave an idea of determination, of a character rather uninviting.

The full, rosy lips, and pearl white teeth, seemed to secure every word that passed through them being pleasant, but if you watched her at play with the child, you could see when the toys would not at once stand straight, or the child knocked down too soon the house she built up with his bricks, a pout in those lips, and a tightening of those

pearly teeth which told a tale of unrestrained temper that seemed to announce as clearly her hot southern blood as the peculiar tint of her skin did. The game was interrupted by the entrance of a foreign bonne.

She gave her mistress a letter, and whilst she read it, sat down by the child to play.

"Bah! Julie!" said the lady, throwing down her letter with a stamp of her small foot, comfortably and prettily encased in an embroidered silk slipper, "I thought it would soon come to this. We shall have to go to England, I suppose; my husband has been trying every way to persuade me lately, and now he has heard his mother is ill, and is off at once."

"*Comment*, Madame, off without saying adieu miladi; I wonder he not ashamed."

"Ah! Julie, you do not understand the English; that is their usual idea of manners; beside, I believe the truth is, he did not dare come and tell me; he knew I should try and keep him from going. But, at least, we shall be more able to do as we like, and have no master for a time."

"And will miladi follow soon to England? What a sorrow it will be always to see the other little boy, who is to have the name and money, and take it from *mon ange*," said the girl, hugging the child, who she now took in her arms to carry off.

The lady's countenance clouded over, and she answered hastily—

"Is it not enough, Julie, that I should have to conform to their stupid laws of inheritance in England, without your constantly reminding me of it. You know I have often

forbidden it. Remember also, Julie, when we do get to England, not a word of gossip, not a word of information to your fellow servants about me, or what I was, or where I met your master. They will be all curiosity, and if ever I find you have gratified them with information, we part at once. You know how painful any reference to my former life or Rubico's death is to me, and I am determined it shall not follow me to England; you understand, Julie?"

"*Mais oui, chere* Madame, you know I also am not anxious they should know too much; I shall never tell no tales—*tranquille donc, mon ange,*" she added, addressing herself to the child, who, during this conversation, had been struggling to get free from her arms back to his toys on the floor; but it was in vain she tried to pacify him; he now broke out in

declared war against her cap, her fichu, her ear-rings, and her nose, and was at last carried off screaming—"me won't go to bed; no—no, me shan't."

The lady threw herself down on the sofa, and drawing a deep sigh, she said to herself aloud, as if the result of her thoughts—

"Yes, it must be so; I cannot expect any longer to keep him away from his friends and his country, but I feel I can never love the children of another—never settle down in a dull country house. He says we are to follow in a week; he will send all directions, and a courier to manage everything for me on the journey." She rose hastily, and pacing the room, added, in by no means a pleasing tone —"A courier, indeed; I know the day when he would have allowed no one but himself to manage a journey for me." Ah! marriage

is an end of such romance, especially with the matter-of-fact Englishman. "But never mind,"—she again spoke her thoughts—"he is my own Vere, and the spirit of his lost Rose cannot come between us, even if her children should;" and with that she left the room, and went to her nursery to have one more look at her boy.

During these three years past, Lady Herbert had—true to her promise—and her son, remained at Thornbury, and taken care of the twins, but she had constantly urged him to return, and tried to persuade him it was his duty to be near his children.

At first he had written often to her, and had talked of the twins with affection, and of returning home with pleasure, been interested in his improvements, but for the last eighteen months his tone had altered. At first his letters

had become constrained; there seemed a mystery about them, and his thoughts and ideas seemed all pre-occupied.

About a year ago he had written formally to tell her he was married to a lovely widow, whose mother was a Spaniard, of high birth and connections, her father was an Irishman; both were dead, and that was all Lady Herbert could ever learn about her from him.

This made her still more anxious for him to return home, and bring his new wife to Thornbury, but he always made excuses, and put it off. He seemed to have quite forgotten latterly to ask after his children, too, which grieved her.

They had been christened. Rose and Rodolph had progressed, after the usual baby fashion, sometimes alarming every one who

took care of them, and then suddenly recovering health and spirits, doing the usual amount of clever baby tricks, to the special delight of their doting grandmamma, who was never separated from them for one week.

Rose was fair, bright, and rosy, always laughing; Rodolph was more serious in manner and countenance.

For some time past it had become evident to every one that the Dowager Lady Herbert was much altered, her health was not what it had been; anxiety and exertion of body or mind now fatigued her, she, who for years had superintended everything connected with her son's estate as well as his education—a strong-minded woman, not in the sense we now take it, an independent female who votes for female suffrage, sets down her husband and contradicts him across the dinner table, opens his

letters, and drives him tohis club for business as well as re creation, attends spiritual lectures, and stands by in the stables whilst they groom the horses; no, I mean by a strong-minded woman, one who puts herself aside, does not particularly care if her dress be blue or pink, provided it is made like a lady's, is becoming her age and station, and attracts no marked attention, but pleases her own family or friends; is well educated, can make it her duty, if required (and fulfil it properly), to attend to the bailiff's accounts and reports, look over the farm with him, walk over the village with the curate, calculate the expenses of the improvements he requires, and give directions accordingly, or enter with cheerfulness into her husband or son's feelings over their game of cricket, or their day's hunting; though she never enters the stables, can quote

latin, tell fairy stories to the children, play with them at blind man's buff, or hide and seek; and still further, dullest of all avocations, look over the butcher, the baker, or the kitchen book, see they are not cheated, and be always cheery, always in good spirits—that is a strong-minded woman, and one only found in England. Such a woman was Lord Vere Herbert's mother, but alas! her best years were past; she, too, felt it was so, and urged her son to come home.

At last, one morning, the servants were startled, as they were about to sit down to their comfortable breakfast, by a noisy peal of their mistress's bell—very unusual at that hour.

"That's my bell, I declare," said Mrs. Green, as she was taking the fresh egg handed

to her by Gregory, the butler. "I must see what her ladyship requires, at once."

"Well, I should not go till it rang again, Mrs. Green," said Gregory; "by Jove, I wouldn't; it is so unreasonable to ring at such a time."

"Now Gregory; how can you," replied the fair abijail, "you know I love my mistress; besides, I have asked you before not to use those strong expressions, they make me nervous;" and with that the simpering, finiking maid left the room.

The room, *par excellence*, for so it is the custom to name that apartment appropriated to the upper servants of all well conducted establishments. The wonder of the others at Mrs. Green's attention, and leaving her half tasted breakfast, was soon replaced by real

anxiety and terror, for Mrs. Green had found her ladyship very ill indeed, and it was necessary to dispatch a messenger at once for Dr. Roberts, from the neighbouring town. On his arrival, his opinion was so bad that they sent a telegram immediately to Lord Herbert, begging him to come.

Alas! in three days Lady Herbert was no more; an affection of the heart, produced by weakness and a slight chill completely prostrated her, and her son returned to Thornbury only in time to see his mother carried to the family vault.

When all was over he announced his intention of remaining at Thornbury, retained the servants, sought for others, sent a trustworthy courier to arrange everything for his wife's journey home, and began to look over the house, assign the rooms, &c., &c. He

seemed very glad to find his children so well, and to be really interested in them, and especially anxious about their room, but all the servants wondered and puzzled at the arrangements. They knew he was to bring home, not only a wife, but a child, and could not think why there need be two nurseries. Lord Herbert said Ferdinand had a foreign nurse, and she must be to herself, and both nurses be near to milady's room, so the twins and their nurse Batt were changed from the old nurseries to some others, though equally good, indeed larger.

This was considered a hardship, and was noted as the first innovation of them foreigners, and "a thing as would have hurt their dear grandmama dreadful. Indeed it was a mercy she did not live to see it."

However, so it was settled, and so it was

done. At the end of a fortnight, Lord Herbert went to London to meet his wife and child, and everything was to be got ready for their reception in a week later.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE LATE BEAUTY.

"THERE is Mr. Seymour, dear aunt, why not invite him," said Emma Sinclair, a joyous fair-headed girl, to her aunt Lady Evandale, as they sat planning a party for Easter at Sinclair Hall, for some country races and other gaeties.

"No, positively no," was the answer, "ever since that evening of the quarrel about

who you were engaged to valse with at the last Christmas Ball, it has been quite disagreeable to sit by when he and your sister Belinda meet—she is so rude to him."

"What signifies, aunt, I am sure I would have danced with both together if they would have let me, I did not care which I had, unless, perhaps, Mr. Seymour is the best dancer, so the nicest partner, only he has very little to say to one; and Lord Vincent talks so much and says such odd things, he makes one feel quite shy and hot all over."

"Well, all I can say is that your sister has been so rude to Mr. Seymour ever since, and has flirted so with Captain Johnson, of the Lancers, I am getting quite annoyed; I shall speak seriously to her," said Lady Evandale.

"With Captain Johnson, aunt, oh! I

thought he was your particular property—that is a shame, I hate poaching."

"Emma, my dear, what do you mean!" almost screamed the chaperone, at the insinuation. "I beg you will not talk slang or make remarks upon me. One can't help attracting more attention than other women if one looks so much younger you know; aud if your uncle heard you speak so he might fancy I had forgotten my position."

"Beg pardon, aunty dear, you know I was only in fun; but I say really, you will have to hoist all sail this summer, if you don't mean to be cut out by the new Lady Herbert, they say she is a stunner, and though she is not to have a party for these races on account of their mourning—she is to be at all the balls, and the races too. We shall make ac-

quaintance and show her how we do things in England."

"My dear, you must be careful how you behave with her; they say she hates England and the English, and that she has all the spirit of revenge, and the deep hates and loves that belong to her Spanish blood. We must try and make it agreeable to her. Now, let me see, we have Lord and Lady George, Sir William Brown and his daughter, Lord Vincent, Mr. Fitzhugh, Captain Johnson, young Mamisty, and with our two guardsmen, Beauclerck and Coventry, we shall, I think, make as good a show as anyone in the county."

After a little more time spent in letter writing, searching for stamps, wondering how to direct the letters, the thing was considered settled—done.

At that moment Lord Evandale appeared, and Emma ran off to discuss matters with her sister.

"My love," said Lord Evandale whose appearance in her ladyship's morning room at all was a remarkable event, and foreboded no good, "I have come to speak to you about the party for Easter. I positively will not have young Howard asked to the house, for I have ascertained as a fact that his father has so mortgaged the property that he could make no settlementss, and when Howard comes into it he will scarcely be able to pay his own debts."

"Indeed, Lord Evandale, I fancy I can judge who to ask and who to omit at my parties without help, but if we are to enquire into everyones finances before they are asked for a race week, we shall have some difficulty

in making up a party," pettishly replied my lady.

"Well, after all, I daresay Howard means nothing, but Belinda is such a goose she will be whining and sighing about, and thinking herself a second Juliet."

"What nonsense, love! Belinda understands all about it. I think it is rather a good thing for a girl to have a man like Howard spooney on her, it makes her the fashion," remonstrated the worldly aunt.

"Well, it does not signify what's the fashion, only remember I will not have him asked this time—if you really want a man to be a good match for the girls, ask George Gordon. He is steady, a good rider, can go straight to hounds, is heir to a large fortune—and never made a bet at a race or backed a card in his

life," said Lord Evandale, in a determined master-of-the-house sort of way.

"Stupid fellow," muttered my lady, "I dare say he is as you say steady and all that, but he can't dance, and as to paying a girl a compliment, taking a good place at croquet, rowing a boat, or teaching a girl to skate, I believe he is a perfect idiot. Certainly as Belinda is to be two and twenty next birthday we may be obliged to look for something of that sort for her. I have this moment been talking about her strange and fanciful behaviour to Mr. Seymour."

"Upon my life, my dear," said Lord Evandale, "I cannot go into all the girl's flirtations, but I daresay Belinda is right. She is a very good judge, and probably Henry Seymour did not play fair." With that the

lord and master retired to the depths of his own sanctum or his turnip fields, to the satisfaction of his better half, and probably by retiring from the scene thus prudently, secured his own peace and quiet also.

Lord Evandale had remained up to the age of fifty a confirmed bachelor, and fine specimen of an English country gentleman. He cared for nothing by way of amusements but his county gaieties, his quarter sessions, his hounds, his partridges and pheasants.

Some years before this he had adopted two orphan nieces, daughters of his next brother. He had educated them at a boarding school, conducted on the most refined and lady-like principles, at Brighton. As a proof of the correctness in manners, no young lady was allowed to sit down to any meal without white kid gloves; they changed their dresses

three times a day, were not allowed to learn any plain needlework, for fear of making their fingers rough, and neither cheese nor beer were ever allowed to be seen or tasted.

Having made them pass six years in this sort of process, taking them home for the holidays, during which time they were under the nominal care and authority of a very meek, gentle, old-fashioned aunt of his, Lord Evandale thought he had fulfilled his duty; but when it came to introducing them to the world, trotting them out, in fact, to look for husbands, giving them a sail on the rough sea of fashion and modern society, what was he to do? The aunt was too slow and old, and he could not think of letting them go, as some girls perhaps must, but many I believe prefer, from a false notion of liberty, with any chance lady, though he might take them to

and from the party; that would never do for Miss Sinclair's, and the only way to manage it was to marry before they left school, and so give them a chaperone.

This was a serious consideration to a bachelor of fifty. and how was it to be done?

Now in the year 1838, when Lord Evandale, who had come into his title and his property just after he came of age, first appeared the fashionable young lady of London was a certain Miss Churchill. Her dancing was considered perfect, the men actually waited on the staircase to get a promise of a valse, if they had not been fortunate enough to see her in the daytime to secure one. She was not actually pretty, but she was piquante; her figure was exquisite, her foot fairy-like, her dress always simple, was always well put on, and sat better than anyone else's.

What the rest of the fair sex suffered in seeing her uuaccountable success is not to be told. So provoking, too, in the shops, you might object as you pleased to a bonnet or a wreath, if you were told that it was exactly what Miss Churchill admired, it was enough, it must be the thing, though to be sure Miss Churchill never wore a wreath; she never indulged in anything beyond a rose or a bunch of geranium in her hair—proud of the classical form of her head, she would not disfigure it.

And for this neat and pleasing specimen of young ladies did the men make utter fools of themselves, and quarrel like children.

Now a real, downright, unmistakeable beauty, such as we sometimes see appear in the London world, never abuses her power and tyrannizes over her subjects as one whose

beauty is youth, whose charm is conversation and fashion; this one can prove from one's own experience any day; and the result is, these fashionable young ladies either make very poor matches or remain unmarried long enough to find themselves thrown aside for some new toy.

In their first triumph, and before they are twenty, they have no end of offers, but their life is too fascinating a one to give up their liberty; they express surprise that the men can be so foolish as to fancy they meant to show any preference, though indeed, whilst the infatuated moth flew round the light, she held it towards him to attract him, and not only received him kindly, but allowed him to load her with bouquets, fans, and all sorts of pleasant trifles, protesting all the while she could not conceive whence they came.

But by the time they are five-and-twenty things alter, they have made many enemies and but few real friends, other girls have taken their place in fashion and favor, some of the men they have jilted have married, and their wives take care to allow very little attention to be paid to the former favorite. The older men are wary, and frightened of the dethroned queen; she is too old to attract the young fellows, they prefer one as inexperienced as themselves, and so the fairy castle they had imagined falls, and in many cases the lady marries some poor curate, who in his country parish has never seen any one before so agreeable, so distinguished, who would notice him or take an interest in his schools when the right side of forty; in other cases she feels sour, sulks with the world, and ends as an old maid picking out faults in all her friends, and

abusing men in general and particular as deceivers and fools.

Now Miss Churchill did neither of these things. She was not a person to be easily soured, neither was she one to part with her identity or liberty to become Mrs. Curate, or Mrs. Cornet either; she knew she was no longer eighteen, she even knew she was no longer five-and-twenty, but at thirty she knew she still looked well and young; she knew amongst strangers she was often taken for two-and-twenty, and she knew she was just the sort of person bachelors of title and good position seek, who put off matrimony from fastidiousness, love of liberty, disappointed love, or other ties, and find when they are themselves a little *passé*, a nephew or a cousin counting on their inheritance, and life in its decline, dull without a companion, a

nurse, or a slave. These were the victims she now looked for. The one fault Miss Churchill never could get over—and no circumstance could make her see—was that at eight-and-thirty she, too, was *passée*; she never could be induced to change her simple white tarlatane for a silk, her Marie Antoinette scarf for a black silk mantilla, or to leave off being simple and naive in her conversation in public; she fancied every debutant young man who was presented her was at once struck and spooney. However, she was not too infatuated to be blind to her own interest, when the *passée* woman found herself sought by the *passé* young man with a title and a good estate, she displayed all her old laid-by angling arts, and landed her fish at St. George's just six months and three days before she was forty. True to herself,

however, to the last, the bride, Lady Evandale, had eight bridesmaids to accompany her at this critical moment, all youthful, dressed in white tarlatanes, and cerisse ribands, veils, and wreaths—she might have asked some of her own contemporary young ladies in London; no doubt many were yet left unclaimed at Cupid's altar, but then it was awkward to refer to dates—better let it all be as young as possible.

"Besides," as Miss Churchill kindly said, "you know, if I were to ask Charlotte Forrester, or Louisa Bouverie, or Georgiana Spencer, it would seem so like saying, you see I triumph over you to the end. I am making a capital match."

And so did Lord Evandale set about his matrimonial business. He had never been a

good dancer, or in any way a drawing-room man, and though he had very properly in his youth gone through the London seasons, he had never done more than look on in the distance at the favourites making fools of the men, and the more matter-of-fact aided by prudent, farseeing mothers, caging the well-plumed birds in matrimony.

When, however, he found a wife would be a proper and almost necessary appendage to his household, he reflected on those he had known in his youth that were worth looking at, and he decided, as he would of a horse, for a beginner late in life—one somewhat long in the teeth would be most useful and least trouble—and having, though perhaps in the distance, also had his little romance about Miss Churchill, he was soon hunting heel, and

when he brought his fox to ground he found it the very one for him, and they were soon on very good terms.

Miss Churchill was made to understand she would have to chaperone the two Miss Sinclairs, who were to come out and be presented at court the following year.

She made her bargain and she stuck fairly to it, though she always said the worst of it was, she was afraid it would be constantly leading to disappointments and misunderstanding, for the girls would so often mistake the attentions of the men towards herself as meant for them. "You see when one looks so young, and is married to a man older than oneself" (there was ten years' difference), "one is scarcely fitted to take grown up women into society; but of course, I shall do my best and dress very dowdily."

At the time our story commences, Miss Churchill had been comfortably established at Sinclair Hall, rejoicing in the title of Lady Evandale for about three years, and the two Miss Sinclairs had been presented and gone through their London season with, no doubt, most beneficial effects; but neither were married, nor did they care to hurry on to that. They were now busy about some county gaiety, which is, after all, much more worth the trouble, and much more fun.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE RACES.

No doubt an English country house life, excepting during the few weeks of a shooting party, or some county races is one that appears most uninteresting and monotonous to foreigners or those brought up abroad, and so it certainly was to Lady Herbert, especially as their mourning prevented their being able to receive more than a casual visitor or so.

Lord and Lady Herbert had now been at home some months, and though at first the sort of homage paid her, the parade of an entrance on the estate, the visits of the neighbours, examining the house, planning all sorts of improvements in the gardens, amused Lady Herbert for a time, this was soon over, and she was looking forward to the races and balls as the only chance of not dying of *ennui.*

Master Ferdinand and his foreign nurse had been established in the old family nurseries, and the twins Rodolph and Rose were put in some very good rooms, but not being traditionally the nurseries, the nurse Batt considered herself insulted, her precious charges injured, pushed aside, and her hatred for Master Ferdinand, his interloper, the nurse Julie, and I fear also for Lady Herbert, was

of that sort nurses delight to indulge in, and I believe consider they cannot do justice to the children committed to their care, without entertaining for every other child who attracts the least praise or attention, or is at all put on a par with theirs.

"Now Mrs. Evans, did you ever? what do you think is the last order that stuck up foreign creature has been and given?" said Batt the nurse, to the housekeeper, one morning when things had been particularly uncomfortable between the two nurseries.

"I am sure I don't know, but what does it matter to us, Batt; you are too condescending in the notice you take of that stuck up thing's sayings and doings. You should act as I do, ignore her, Batt; don't see her, don't hear her, that's the way to treat them. I learnt it

when I was a child, and lived with my great uncle, the French cook."

"Well, perhaps you are right Mrs. Evans, but you see I am that open hearted, and forgiving like, I never can help a making it up after, especially when she helps me to trim my cap, or gives me a new idea for little Miss Rose's dress, for I must say they are a good hand at finery."

"Yes, you may well say that, Mrs. Batt, their ideas are all flimsy and perishable like, but you have not told me what is the last order for madame."

"Mademoiselle, if you please, Mrs. Evans, she ain't elevated to our position yet, at all events. Why, if she haven't been and ordered Marianne to bring her up ragout every night for her supper, and says nothing else don't

agree with her, and it's Lady Herbert's wish she should have it."

"Oh, well I daresay the cook will understand all about it, if not I can give her a hint, a ragout's soon made, a little overboiled raggy meat, with plenty of grease and a little vinegar."

"Hush, hush, Mrs. Evans, if there isn't my lady's voice, and scolding my Rodolph too, I must be off."

Off bustled Mrs. Batt, thoroughly persuaded, she was much injured in the ragout question, as well as every other where Julie was concerned.

Lady Herbert might have occupied and amused herself, perhaps, by the care of Lord Herbert's children, but she had come over determined to hate them, and she found no reason to change. Rodolph stood between Mr.

Ferdinand and his title and inheritance; this idea she brooded over, she thought of it, dreamt of it, and allowed others to refer to in her presence, till at last it was the one predominiating idea she carried always about with her.

One unfortunate consequence of Lady Herbert's being in some degree a foreigner, and having come over to England with such prejudices, was that she made a confidante of her maid Julie.

Nothing can be a greater drawback to happiness than for a wife to make a confidante of her maid, or for any lady to allow her maid to be on such a footing with her, as to venture to advise or speak as an equal, but not only was Julie in that position with Lady Herbert, but she appeared also to have some mysterious hold over her, to know something of her early

life that Lady Herbert did not wish others should know, and whenever any attempt was made to make Julie conform to the rules of the household at Thornbury contrary to her inclinations, a few moments' conversation with her mistress removed all difficulties, and Julie again ruled supreme. Her hatred towards poor Rodolph, the innocent stumbling block to her Mr. Ferdinand exceeded that of Lady Herbert's, and she seemed prepared for any measure that might by luck, without actual crime, displace him.

Batt seemed to think that even crime would not be quite new to her, and the mysterious understanding between nurse and mistress was a constant inducement to Batt's curiosity. She watched them when together, especially if the twins were present, as she would some cunning snake that might twine its coils

round her darlings, and suffocate them in spite of her.

The race day came, the party from Thornbury consisted of Lord and Lady Herbert, a cousin of his, Mary Vere, and two men friends of Herbert's.

They drove on to the course, and placed their carriage next to the Evandale party. Everyone was eager to see the Spanish bride, as they called her, and she looked to great advantage in a handsome grey silk, trimmed with black lace, a black lace bonnet, put on almost like a mantilla, with one large grey flower, and a diamond butterfly on the top of her hair. She liked to keep up the idea of her foreign birth, and apparently rather aimed at doing the Spaniard to the astonished country neighbours, but somehow all pride and show suddenly left her as one of those nui-

sances of all race going, a gipsy, came up to the carriage.

"Ah! Miladi, let me tell your fortune, it's a lucky one; I know by your eyes."

"Go away, do; Vere, do send this woman away," and she turned her back upon her, appealing to Lord Herbert, who was on the box, eagerly discussing the merits of a new steam plough he had just started, with a fellow agriculturist.

"Now, my good lady, don't turn your back on the poor gipsy, that's not lucky; come, cross my hand with a piece of silver, for you love a gentleman,"—and much more useful and interesting information she was no doubt about to give her of the colour of his hair, and the exact appearance of her rival, when Lord Herbert looked round, and with an angry gesture, and some rather strong lan-

guage, drove her away; and then speaking in a low voice to Lady Herbert, who had nearly fainted, he seemed to reassure her. He desired the footman to get her ladyship some champagne out immediately, and added, "Thomas, you will remember for the rest of the day it is your business to keep the carriage clear of all those dirty tiresome people; especially, mind, I object to gipsies, and if your mistress is annoyed again to-day, I part with you to-morrow."

The somewhat astonished domestic bowed his acquiescence, and Lady Herbert feeling a little revived by a tumbler of champagne, was able to forget the gipsy.

"How extraordinary it is," said Emma Sinclair, in the next carriage, "that anybody from Spain should have such a horror of gipsies. Did you hear, Lord Vincent, how angry

they were at one coming near; and Lady Herbert nearly fainted. As to him I never heard Lord Herbert fly out so."

"It does seem strange to be so put out at those old creatures," he answered, "and they lose a great deal of fun; and so shall we, for those singers and hangers on are half the fun of the races."

However, on the other side of the Sinclair carriage, they managed to have great fun with the gipsies; Emma and Belinda between them put up one of them to several little flirtations in the neighbourhood.

The races went on merrily, the ladies became quite excited as the horses passed before the race, and fancied they each could pick out the winner, an idea fully confirmed at the end, when the devoted men declared

they had lost and owed gloves and fans innumerable.

"Lord Vincent, how can you?" said Emma Sinclair, "I am quite shocked at you; if you say such naughty things I shall have to pass you over to Lady Herbert to be lectured."

"Well but, Miss Sinclair," he remonstrated, you knov it is really true, Miss St. George bet Lady Anne Grey a real coral necklace she made the Duke of York propose within ten days to them both—and she won too—only like all women she could not resist the pleasure of telling female friends, and so the Duke got out of both."

"It is so absurd," answered Emma, "what can be the pleasure of telling women things you know they will be far too jealous to

enjoy, I can't think—telling a man a bit of fun is quite *autre chose.*"

"Oh, I'll tell you a better thing than that," he rejoined, "you know the fuss there was about Lord Ronald and Miss Bouverie in the winter well, only think—"

"Hush, I am sure you had better not say it before Belinda," and their conversation sunk into the whisper now fashionable between young ladies and their partners.

"Lord Vincent," at last interrupted Lady Evandale, "we can't allow you to be exclusive to-day; let me introdue you to Lady Herbert. When they are not balancing themselves on a carriage step or the wheel, we expect gentlemen in England to make a bow on being presented to a lady, but under present circumstances, Lady Herbert, pray excuse the ceremony—allow me to introduce

you to Lord Vincent, he will put you up to every bit of gossip before you even get to London, and keep you *au fait* of it there."

The introduction took place, and seemed perfectly satisfactory to both parties, for from that moment Vincent belonged to the Thornbury party. He seemed fascinated at once, and did not leave Lady Herbert for the rest of the afternoon.

Emma Sinclair felt perhaps mortified, but as she was a favorite, she had always plenty of *preux* chevaliers ready to attend upon her, she was soon apparently as confidential and quite as merry with one of the guardsmen.

The next day only the gentlemen went to the races, because there was to be a ball in the evening, and "you know," said Lady Evandale, "it is not fair upon one's partners in the evening to get knocked up."

"No, aunt, dear; but I have heard these men say, that the hunters of several seasons standing, should never be allowed to rest and lay up, they never come out sound, and as to a young thoroughbred, why that can't be tired, so don't you think we might all go to the races on the same principle?"

"Nonsense, Emma, you know your uncle never allows it; any gentleman can go, but I hope two or three will take compassion on us, and stay and carve for us at luncheon."

Of course some did remain, and some went to the races. In the afternoon some of the party drove over to Thornbury to see the place, and when they returned they were full of all sorts of stories of the goings on there.

First they exclaimed "Who do you think we found there, very busy laying out the new gardens with my lady?—why my Lord Vin-

cent, who had been so very particular in saying he must go to the races; he wanted to meet some fellows about a meeting and a croquet club."

Then the children—Lady Herbert's precious boy, Ferdinand, was the most spoilt, ugly little thing you ever saw. He shrieked and kicked for everything, and was dressed in velvet and satin and lace; but the twins were the greatest darlings you ever saw, only dressed so plain, and looking so frightened—evidently unaccustomed to coming downstairs and being noticed.

"Well, thank heaven, we none of us need be step-mothers, or undertake the care and education of other people's children unless we choose," all the young ladies joined in chorus.

"But, my dears," said Lady Evandale "you don't mean to say Lord Vincent was there,

and so intimate as to be asked his advice about the new gardens."

"Yes, yes, aunty," said Emma, "I told you how it would be. Lady Herbert will carry off all our heroes; won't it be fun, in our summer parties we shall be reduced entirely to our female friends and a few old grey-haired veterans; when we want to dance we shall run over to Thornbury for Lady Herbert and the young men."

"Fie, Emma! you must not learn such slang manners; here is tea, now let us be serious, and settle how we are all to go to the ball to-night."

"There is an omnibus, aunt, for the men, and just two places for Belinda and me, because you know we could not think of putting our visitors in an omnibus."

"Very well, love, on condition you take

Sir William Reid also, for as your cousin and a married man, I shall trust to him as your chaperone."

"All right, cousin John is by no means a bad fellow, and he shall be admitted to the four-wheeled sanctum—but I vote this tea very slow, girls, let us go and have a turn at croquet before we make love to our looking glasses."

Away they all sped, and Lady Evandale thinking she ought to be fatigued, and that the men would not be back from the races for some time, retired, saying "really country gaiety was so trying, she had never seen anything of the kind before she married, and she could not get accustomed to it."

Lady Evandale had never lived in the country before she married; she really did not know anything of the life leed there, either

for gaiety or domestic life. Her father had died when she was young, her mother made her home in London, and though Miss Churchill was often asked by cousins and others to join them on some festive occasions, she had never gone but once, and that was for some races—she had only staid three race days, and from that had certainly formed a most Utopian idea of country society—but the truth was, her home was in London. Her mother had fallen into bad health, and since she was fifteen she had never seen her walk about or able to do like other people. She was in no more danger of death than others, the doctors said, and she suffered no acute pain, but it seemed lonely to leave her, and Lady Evandale had made the resolution, which she firmly kept, never to leave again unless absolutely obliged, as on that one occasion she

found in her absence nothing had gone right or comfortably with the dear invalid. She had numbers of London acquaintance, and plenty of society without going away to seek it.

When, therefore, she came to live in the country, and as a person of some consequence in the neighbourhood, she had to entertain and, perhaps more trying, to be entertained she often found it irksome, so that besides her love of doing the interesting fine lady in *petite santé*, she really did get tired.

Her mother had died a year before her marriage. On this day after the races they were to have a dinner party—that most awful of country horrors. This was what Lady Evandale had such difficulty in imagining could afford any one pleasure.

There is an idea when friends from a dis-

tance stay with you, it is a proper opportunity for a dinner party, and that it is doing honor to them, to put them through this exercise. The result is this—your visiting friends stand aloof as a rule (though happily there are exceptions) and if one or two have been ever so distant and ill-suited to each other, they will fraternise on this occasion, and enquire of each other, "who are they?—never heard that name before," &c., as if many of the best old county families are not totally unknown to the London world. They say—"very odd society, and where did they get their clothes?"

Never mind, you think, there is Lady Louisa Maule coming—they will know her, and the Dean and his wife, they always go to London in the season—forgetting that the railways running into London during the season do not empty the whole of their first-class

passengers into one large assembly room. Then Colonel Rodes, he was a guardsman—but oh, horror! your earl's daughter arrives in a black velvet dress, exactly two years back in fashion, a tawdry gold and black head-dress, with one feather that will come round and curl just under her chin, and when pushed away remains bolt upright above her ear, in which position it was as she entered, arm-in-arm of all gone-by fashions, with her little fat husband, draws up straight in front of you, and makes a stiff curtsey—you introduce her to the most assailable of your house guests, she tries weather, the Queen, the state of crops, and such general topics, all of which last a very short time, owing to the immense command of monosyllables her new acquaintance possesses.

The Dean bustles in without a moment's

breathing time, saying his wife can't exactly get her petticoats to rights; the crinoline is up side down or some such thing. This is considered very facetious, but would not be agreeable for Mrs. Dean, if she knew this joke has preceded her entrance—only she is accustomed to the Dean's funny sayings, and the London company are not.

Then it is so absurd, Earl's daughters rank themselves before peeresses, so plain Lady Louisa in her tailless velvet goes out before Lady St. John, and the Dean's wife is an Honourable, and goes before the pretty widow in West's last thing in silks, and the Honourable James Bowley's wife in one of Descou's most lovely toilettes.

In the evening when the ladies come out, the ladies in the house become industrious, work and speak in suppressed whispers on an ottoman.

Lady Louisa tries to get on with Lady St. John, suggests she knew one of her sisters.

"Oh, yes; she was much older than me—is married now, and lives in quite a different set—we seldom meet in society."

Lady Lousia relapses into parish talk, troublesome servants, good schools, and takes wholesome advice from the Dean's wife, how to manage everything, from her eldest boy's education down to the bantam hen that won't lay eggs.

The gentlemen come out—all stand at the further end of the room—look at their watches, saunter up to the lady of the house, and make some foolish remarks, and the strangers look with envy on the lodgers who gather round the widow.

They try music and whist—but the gulf between the two parties cannot be filled up.

These were the entertainments that tried

Lady Evandale's energies. She loved to be popular, and did her best to please; but she said, "my London friends would have been much happier alone, they prefer their own stupidity to the variety of fresh faces and voices at dinner; and my neighbours would have had a very pleasant dinner without them another night." But no, it has always been the custom to arrange it thus, and it would seem strange to alter, so she did her best.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LISTENERS.

THORNBURY HALL is once again open, to the numerous friends of Lord and Lady Herbert, the year of mourning is over, and in these days that is considered ample time to mourn that irreplacable loss—a mother—according to the newspaper, Lord and "Lady Vere Herbert are entertaining a fashionable and select party at Thornbury, and amongst the enter-

tainments provided for the next week are to be two nights of Amateur Theatricals, in which the beautiful hostess herself is to appear, as well as many other distinguished amateurs."

Every one is busy in the house, everyone has some additional anxiety, and something they are especially anxious should go especially well — excepting the nurse, Batt. Her precious children are too small even to appear to company after sunset, and as Julie is the principal costumier on the occasion it is reason enough for her to declare, she considers all such performances objectionable, and as to helping that minx, she couldn't bring herself to do it.

"No, let them furiners amuse themselves that way if they will; as to her dear late mistress, lawks! she wonders she don't ap-

pear and speak to them, she held those vulgarities in such horror."

However, as everyone got on very well without Batt's help, why, it did not matter what she thought.

However, she was not less curious to collect all the tittle-tattle of her mistress she could; indeed, I do not know what she would have done had she been deprived of her favourite occupation of watching Lady Herbert and her maid Louise, and putting her very worst interpretation upon everything they did.

One day, being caught in a shower of rain when out on the lawn with the two children, she took refuge in the conservatory, supposing it would clear off again.

The conservatory opened into the drawing-room—there she heard voices, and of course

listened. The more she heard of the conversation, the more interested she became. The two people speaking were Lady Herbert and Lord Vincent. She could not see them —only heard.

Lord Vincent—"Alone; how fortunate."

Lady Herbert—"Oh! you here?"

Lord Vincent—"I find you still alone"

Lady Herbert—"Heavens! I thought you were gone?"

Lord Vincent—"Yes, indeed, I wished to fly—to tear myself away without seeing you again, to bury my own secret in my heart—but, alas! I return; I feel I have not strength to quit you and live at a distance from you."

Lady Herbert—"What do you say? What do I hear?"

Lord Vincent—"What do I say; can you not guess. Have my eyes been able to dis-

semble what was in my heart. Have you not penetrated my secret?"

Lady Herbert—"Oh! Charles; you terrify me."

Lord Vincent—"That fatal secret which I wished for ever to stifle in my heart, and which I would have kept, perhaps, for ever, if you had not first blessed me with a glimpse of happiness—if my soul had not found an echo in yours. Ah! Lucile—since you love me, Lucile—"

Batt, who had been almost bursting with indignation during this conversation, now actually addressed the geraniums and the roses in her horror.

"Why, she has actually been and told him she loved him. She, to pretend to be the honest wife of my dear master. Oh! if it ain't just like them foreigners—but let's listen,

I'll know it all, now I have begun;" so she took up her post at the door again.

Lady Herbert—"For heaven's sake speak lower; if any one were to hear you."

Lord Vincent—"Since you love me, happiness smothers all—the voice of conscience, friendship, all fade before your love."

Lady Herbert—"Enough, enough. I cannot any longer permit this—if my husband were to come."

Mrs. Batt says to the flowers—"Well, the wretch she is a bit frightened, at all events. Let's hear the end of their wickedness."

Lord Vincent—"Yes, let us fly, let us quit this house, fly together."

Lady Herbert—"But stay, Vincent, repeat from where you say you love me."

Lord Vincent—"Oh, as often as you like; I am not tired."

At that moment the twins, who had been making crackers of the flower seeds and puddings in the peat earth, upset two large flower pots, which startled Lady Herbert and Lord Vincent in the drawing-room; they, with Mr Seymour and Miss Emma Sinclair, appeared in the conservatory, and took Mrs. Batt so completely by surprise in her horror at all she had overheard, that it was evident to them all she had been listening. Lady Herbert, never sorry of an opportunity of finding her or the elder children in fault, and never accustomed to control her temper with servants, turned quickly upon her, saying:

"Really, Batt, I am ashamed of you; listening at the drawing-room door is an unpardonable offence. You positively shall quit my service next week."

"I am not in your service, and never was;

I am Lord Herbert's servant, and mean to be a truthful, faithful one to him too, I can tell you," answered Batt, "whatever you may be."

White with anger at the insult, Lady Herbert told her to get out of her sight; and proceeding to where the children were, frightened at what they had done, trying to put the plants straight, she gave them both a box in the ears only fit for a sturdy school boy, and which a master in a good school would have felt sorry afterwards he had given. Out of the conservatory she went again, and rejoined her friends in the drawing-room, with as sweet and calm a smile as if nothing had happened to ruffle her. They had not heard what passed, because the moment they found it was only a case of domestic trouble they had returned to their seats, and were discuss-

ing all sorts of theatricals difficulties, for of course all the clever listener had overheard was rehearsing; though she never discovered her mistake, and went away to her nursery in a perfect hurricane of passion at her ladyship's wickedness both to her husband and his children.

Batt had one friend in the establishment, who was as wrathful against Lady Herbert as herself, and that was Brown, the second gardener, her sweetheart.

His particular department was the flower garden near the house and the conservatory. The cause of affront to him was that on coming to Thornbury Lady Herbert had found fault with the way the beds were laid out, and had them all done over again; and as Lord Vincent had great taste for such matters, he had assisted her very much, and

they were done quite contrary to Brown's ideas, who, indeed, had been spoilt during Lord Herbert's long visit abroad, by having it all his own way. Besides, Lady Herbert was always abusing the English climate, and saying how beautifully and easily every flower grew in her beautiful Spain. As Brown was a real John Bull, to find fault with England in comparison to any other country was a crime not easily to be forgiven; so Batt and Brown, with their mutual affronts and imaginary injuries, had entered into a close compact of revenge to cement their love.

Brown who was soon informed of all Batt had heard, was highly indignant, but on reflection fancied the woman had exaggerated it, as he said women always did of each other there was no doubt, and to convince him Batt promised, at any risk, to let him know when

next she saw anything suspicious, forgetting she had as yet seen nothing herself, only heard.

A day or two after this storm Brown was attending to the plants in the conservatory, and the door was open to the drawing-room. He heard voices, and amongst them Lady Herbert's, Miss Sinclair's, and two or three of the gentlemen. He was determined to listen, equally determined to prove to Mrs. Batt she was exaggerating.

Miss Sinclair—"Worse, far worse—he married me. We went to Paris, where soon after—pardon this emotion—the Count was arrested one morning at breakfast on a charge of—how shall I utter it—on a charge of swindling."

Mr. Seymour—"Dear me! a little eccentricity of the Count's, to which the prejudices of society are rather opposed!"

Miss Sinclair—" He was tried, found guilty, and sent to the galleys for twenty years ; but he broke his heart, and died in twelve months, leaving me with a sweet little cherub."

Mr. Seymour—" Oh ! a limited liability in long clothes !"

Miss Sinclair—" My angel Adolphe. I returned with him to England without delay ; in order to avoid impertinent remarks, I resumed my maiden name, put my sweet babe out to nurse, and stifled the feelings of a mother."

Mr. Seymour—" But what did they say at home ?"

Miss Sinclair—" Up to the present moment I have managed to keep the secret, but now I am in a dreadful dilemma—the woman with whom I placed my Adolphe is dead, and they are about to send the child home to me."

Mr. Seymour—"But what can I possibly do for you?"

Miss Sinclair—"You may procure a protector for him—one who would cherish my sweet blossom."

When it came to this interesting point, Brown could not be any longer content to listen alone, besides he felt he had so misjudged his loving Batt. No doubt she did not exaggerate the conversations of the drawing-room at all, and there was much to be learnt from them now—information that might be useful some day and fetch money: a witness, too, would be better in such a case, so he just stepped out into the Italian garden and asked Mrs. Batt to come in, having provided himself with a bunch of grapes to keep Master Rodolph and Miss Rose quiet.

They returned to the conservatory noiselessly.

"Hush!" said Batt; "hush! Who is there?"

"Oh, a rare spicey lot of them!" said Brown. "Listen—that's that impudent Mr. Seymour now a speaking."

Mr. Seymour—"Circumstances which I need not now explain oblige me to resign the child to some dear friend who will preserve my secret and be a father to the boy. You're the man for the solemn trust."

Lord Vincent—"Me a father! Oh! impossible, quite impossible."

Mr. Seymour—"Nothing is impossible to friendship and in the delicate situation in which I am placed."

Lord Vincent—"But, my dear fellow, I've a natural antipathy to them."

Mr. Seymour—"But you will learn to love this little cherub as if it were your own."

Lord Vincent—"I'd strangle or drown the little cherub in the waterbutt before a week."

"Oh, lawks! Brown, how venomous he is—what a brute he must be!" said Batt, *sotto voce.*

"Oh, awful! ain't it," answered Brown. "This is a go!"

Just at that moment they were startled by Lady Herbert's voice, saying—

"Hush, hush, Lord Vincent, you must stop; here is Lord Herbert coming with visitors. You know nobody in the county, knows anything of our plans, and I hope Vere does not either; I have done my best to keep it all secret from him."

"Good gracious!" said Batt; "if her

ladyship were to find me here again, I don't know what I should do;" so catching hold of her two children she hurried them out at the further door of the conservatory, and was soon quietly seated in the Italian garden again, having expressed her feelings to Brown by various grimaces of wonder, horror, and mystery.

Brown continued tending his plants most assiduously, and the friends in the drawing-room dispersed; they were succeeded by a party of stiff morning visitors, who walked round the gardens, and especially noticed Lady Herbert's improvements—not at all what Brown intended them to do, not one word of regret for the flower beds they had so often admired in his dear old mistress's time. "The new ones were really charming."

"Just like the rest of them," thought Brown; "all for the new fangled foreign notions."

As soon as all was quiet for the evening, and the twins fast asleep, Mrs. Batt slipped out to the first lodge, where Brown lived, and they took a little walk together, as they usually did, for their health they said.

"Well, Brown, what do you say now?" began Mrs. Batt, who had scarcely been able to contain herself all the afternoon, or to refrain from addressing the twins in their evening bath, and requesting their opinion as to the behaviour of their step-mother. "Do I exaggerate? indeed, is not the goings on in this house now a perfect disgrace? don't you feel for poor dear master?"

"Why, yes," says Brown; "I suppose he

have got his supper cut for him and not buttered neither—at leastways, it 'll be salt, not sweet butter."

"Poor gentleman!" Batt kindly expressed herself, "and them angels of children as I have the care of, too; it's wicked the way she treats them."

"But, Batt," says Brown, "what do astonish me is the news of Miss Sinclair; who ever would have thought she had been a mother! I felt sorry, too, she should be so deceived by that pretence Count."

"I have heard, Brown, as how Lord Evandale never would have married, only he had promised his dying brother to take care of his two orphans, and he ain't a man to fly from his word, he ain't."

"No, indeed; you never said a truer word, Batt. He ain't a man as ever flys from his

word. Why, didn't he promise my poor old grandmother one of them almshouses, and when she came to want it, and Dame Abdy got well instead of dying as everyone has a right to expect she was going to, why he put her into the lodge there with all the liberty and the same allowances as the houses has."

"Well, as I said, Brown, he promises to educate and do for these nieces, and when they grow'd up they proved, what the lady's call that fast, he found he must have a wife to look after them; so he went and got married."

"And I'm happy to say," triumphantly added Brown, "he has got a very good wife, and is very happy and unmolested by her."

"But I didn't think, Brown, Miss Sinclair had so much need of looking after as we heard to-day. What a shame of the mistress of that

fine school to let her go away and get married to a Count unbeknown to her family."

"Do you think, Batt, it is our duty, and the gratitude as we owe to Lord Evandale, to go and tell him what we know," asked Brown, rather nervously.

"Oh no, dear no," said Batt, "you don't know what a lot of these little secrets the young ladies have, bless you. We can make use of what we know some day you see if it is useful; but don't disturb the poor dear gentleman now. Shakespeare or somebody else says somewhere—

'Where ignorance is bliss,
'Twere folly to be wise.'"

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE GRAND NIGHT.

At last the great day arrived. The house was full of company; everyone at Thornbury seemed busy and anticipating much pleasure. Lord Herbert was to know nothing of the programme of amusements. He had given *carte blanche* to his handsome wife's entertainment, to make up for all the months she had been at home in mourning. Fortunately

he had been much occupied the last week in magisterial duties with Lord Evandale, and in various county matters—a dispute about boundaries, and such things; so that he had no idea that a lovely little stage had been erected at the end of the ball-room, and the county neighbours had been requested to fill their houses, and come one night for a ball, one for a concert, the other for theatricals.

Nine o'clock struck.

"Now, ladies," said Mr. Howard, who had been appointed stage manager, "are you already? The overture is beginning—to your places."

"One minute, please," said Miss Sinclair, in a despairing tone, "my maid can't make my wig secure, and they have painted my eyebrows quite crooked."

"What is to become of me," cries a young

fellow from Worsley Barracks, who fancies he is fit to act Hamlet, but whose part being allotted to him according to his friend's estimate of his talents, was to do stage servant, messenger, &c., as required. "My man has gone and packed me up shoes that are not fellows, and everyone is sure to remark it, and my studs are blue, with a green lining. I say, Howard, what shall I do."

"Why, go on at the proper time and say the right words, and depend upon it not one of the audience will have the least idea what you have on."

"Come, I say, old fellow, you might as well be civil, though you are stage manager."

"Pooh, pooh; no time to think of supers now? Oh! there's that horrid lamp gone out, and where is Miss Sinclair! She begins, and they say she feels faint. Everybody's

ready now, then—all in your places—going to begin. Where's that confounded footman with his blue studs?"

Bang, bang, goes the last chords of the overture, and up goes the curtain, to the comedy of "Everybody's Friend." It was somewhat curtailed, as indeed almost every piece requires to be for amateurs, and most of them would be improved by being cut for the professionals.

The whole piece went off most brilliantly, with rounds of applause. It is curious that in London you may play ever so well, to what is called a fashionable audience, that is to say, ladies and gentlemen, but you can get no *bonâ fide* applause. I suppose it is vulgar in London, and anything beyond a smile, and the questionable praise of "really that is not bad," can't be expected, but get the same people in the country house, and like the

horses at a circus who require the excitement of music to perform well, you have a chance of feeling excited, and made to act better by the real enjoyment you appear to afford, and the hearty laugh that sometimes escapes from their more natural manners and country customs.

Lord Vincent, as Major de Boots, was irresistible—Lady Herbert, as Mrs. Swandown, astonished every one by her easy cool manner, and the thorough absence of grandiose grandeur. They none of them were as yet very intimate with her, and had only seen her on state occasions at a few county meetings, where she was bored, and did the great lady. Miss Sinclair, as Mrs de Boots, took her idea of the character from a certain Miss Selina Bright, an old maid, who lived in the neighbouring village, and who, she felt sure would make

just such a wife when she married the Doctor, which event had been long expected, only the Doctor had not as yet found any one to buy his custom, and so enable him to retire.

"You see one of our family could not possibly marry a medical man in practice" she would say, "so we must wait till fate as well as cupid smiles upon us," in a would-be youthful tone, though in all other subjects she was matter of fact and strong-minded enough to settle two or three medical men in practice, too. For I believe, for the practice part, her admirer might as well have resigned. When his correspondents came to look at his books and settle the purchase, it always ended in their finding nothing to purchase.

But we digress. In the third Act, when our military friend appeared with some letters, he was, to his great satisfaction, received with

great applause; but he nearly upset the prompter, manager, and every one else, for young Wellesley fancied it was an acknowledgment of his remarkable talent, whilst others saw it was caused by one of the false calves he had—he fancied unperceived by any one—put inside his stockings to improve his legs, having most unceremoniously shifted its position and appeared on his shin.

Miss Emma Sinclair made a most mischievous and lively Mrs. Featherley, and the pleasure of the audience was really genuine. The next piece was the comedietta Book third, Chapter the first, in which Lady Herbert and Mr. Vincent, with Mr. Seymour, were admirable.

They had decided to have no regular farce, because in a drawing-room they generally are voted vulgar.

It was all over by twelve o'clock. The visitors had had supper, and started off home. Those who had been performing had an acting supper, and made a very merry party of it.

"Oh! Mr. Howard, how could you be so unkind? You knew I was so nervous, and yet you would have us begin; just, too, as I felt so faint," said Miss Sinclair.

"Well, Miss Sinclair, it's not the first time I have been stage manager, and I have always observed the very best moment to begin always is when the ladies say they feel faint, for women never really exert themselves excepting on great occasions, and when they are positively put to it, then they go in and win to a certainty. Now I flatter myself no one can this evening say anything against my experience in the result, at all events."

Great cheers follow for each other, and Mr. Howard in particular.

"Oh! Lord Vincent, I was so sorry I made such a stupid mistake," said Emma Sinclair, "in our scene."

"It did not matter at all; you got out of it so well no one perceived it," he good-naturedly assured her, though indeed it was the *fiasco* of the evening, for by forgetting her part and position in the end of second act she had spoiled the tableaux and the joke.

"However," said young Wellesley, "I think I put that all straight, for you see my appearance just then so attracted the eyes and attention of the appreciative audience, that they forgot where you ought to have been. There is no thing like stage experience in such cases, and having one of the company up to an emergency of the sort."

This last specimen of conceit in their representative of Her Majesty's army, so completely upset the gravity of the party that they voted themselves tired, and went off to bed.

Every one of the audience went away more or less satisfied, but of course as each party got safely together they began to criticise pretty closely every character.

The Misses Sinclair were staying at Thornbury for the week, but Lord and Lady Evandale had taken over a carriage or two full, and when the gentleman got into the smoking room at Sinclair they spoke freely.

"What a fool Herbert must be," said one; "and allow all this to go on in his house. Upon my word I think he did feel a little uncomfortable when he thought of all the rehearsing there must have been of those stage embracings."

"Well you know in most cases it wouldn't matter a bit. If you couldn't trust your wife so far let her go, I say, and much luck to the man who goes with her," said another.

"Yes, it is true, Herbert's case is not like most of us you see; his marriage was a fishy one. Never knew who his wife was before, you know. Picked her up in an hotel in Corsica, they say."

"Ah! I wouldn't trust those women; no, certainly not as far as I could see them, much less out of my sight."

"The walls don't hear, I suppose. What did you think of those two girls?"

"That their education was pretty nearly complete as women of the period, and what was wanting Lady Herbert will soon supply; but they are two as jolly nice girls as I ever

came across, and I don't mind how many more of the same sort I meet."

"Yes, only I would rather they were neither my wife nor my sisters."

"Oh, of course that is *tout autre chose*—as to sisters, I have none; but I have always thought they must be a frightful responsibility—as to a wife that's an unavoidable necessity some day I fancy, but I don't care for myself how remote a one."

"The girls in these days are certainly pretty free and easy, and don't give one much trouble; they do all the running, all one wants is a sharp bit to bring them up sometimes, and a good bearing-rein to keep them straight on the hills."

"Yes, deuced hard to keep them straight sometimes."

"I suppose Seymour will have to propose

to Belinda Sinclair after this. Did you see how frightfully cross my lady looked in that scene between Mr. de Boots and Featherley, when they talked of their happy by-gone days?'

"Well, much better do it at once; the way they have been going on is absurd, and I wonder it has not made him fight shy of the whole thing long ago."

The next evening at Thornbury was a quiet one, only music and little confidential knots of friends about the different rooms, that were all thrown up and lighted with the taste and luxuriance foreigners understand so much better than English people. It was one of those things Lady Herbert said English women were so stupid about. They were anxious enough to look well, and, as a race, justly proud of their skins and complexions;

but what was the use of perfection in either, if the rooms were never lighted?—the most they ever thought of doing was gas, and that placed above them, so that their heads threw all their neck into the shade. No, wax lights round the room at the proper heighth, and an occasional lamp, very softly shaded, was the thing. She took care to arrange all this in the new decorations she had had put in the rooms at Thornbury. This was the first time of their being seen, and certainly no one could dispute their beauty, and the artistic taste that had directed them. The drawing-room paper was like a silvery tissue, and now and then a wreath or bunch of forget-me-nots seemed to have fallen and adhered to the walls, so naturally and beautifully were they painted.

Each corner of the room had a sort of

corner looking-glass from top to bottom, let in without a frame, and on which some of the flowers seemed also to have fallen—by this you lost all idea of the usual box-like feeling of walls. There were several large mirrors also in the room, the frames of which were silvered glass. The carpet was in the shades of blue, without any distinct pattern; the furniture and curtains a most delicate blue rep, and the wood work painted white, with a little beading of blue made to look like a setting of turquoise.

The library being Lord Herbert's special morning room, had been only renovated in ordinary English style. Then the large saloon, at the end of which the little stage had been erected, was redecorated with equal taste in the Italian style of frescoed ceiling, the walls all had the new painting like gobelin

tapestry, and the most lovely effect. It was so arranged that it formed a kind of proscenium for a stage, orchestra, or concert platform.

In these lovely rooms they wandered and admiringly; some were occupied with the last arrangements for the next evening, when they were to have two charades and a little concert; some only rested, some only flirted, some only laughed, but none cried.

The next evening came, and with it its audience, its nervousnesses, its litttle disagreements, and, we may add, its successes.

They acted first Penelope. Pen was made by funny Capt. Rogers of the Rifles, who, as a hard working old comic writer, read over and commented upon his articles, and went through a most absurd scene between him-

self and an imaginary editor, to whom he tried to sell his writings.

Elope was a gentleman eloping with a lady from a country house who agreed to descend from the window at a given hour into his arms, but before starting made the condition she was to remain veiled from that moment till the fatal knot was tied. He agrees, carries her off in triumph, but returns, an interval of six hours being supposed to have elapsed, to say that he is the most ill used of individuals, for the girl got her boy brother of fifteen to personate her, and as the clergyman, bribed for the occasion, asked the bride would she take this man for her wedded husband, &c., he threw off the veil, and laughing, rushed off. He appeals to the public to know if that wasn't the cruellest sell a man ever had

put upon him. This was very well carried out by Lord Vincent and Miss Emma Sinclair.

The whole Penelope was made a very pretty scene of by Lady Herbert and several of the rest of the party, who grouped themselves very well, and Lady Herbert recited two or three verses of Pope's translation of the Iliad.

Then came Night-Mare. Night a very pretty view of the Coloseum of Rome, painted by Lord Vincent, and illuminated, with a party of English arriving to see it, and two or three Italian peasants lying half asleep in the foreground.

Mare was a scene all gentlemen in a dining room after dinner, discussing their horses and racing in general—one more eager and excited than the rest, with a very broad Irish accent, backs his mare Idleness against them

all, and ends by taking a heavy bet with a French count of the party that he will ride her to Exeter and back in a given number of hours.

The whole—Night-Mare, was made most amusing by the low comedy man, Captain Rogers. He arrives at an hotel; has met with, and meets again with all sorts of trouble, but the sweet little chamber-maid, as he supposes her to be, Miss Emma Sinclair, is enough to make anything charming. He is, however, much disgusted when he asks to be shown his room, to find she is the landlord's daughter, and was only there on a visit, and appeared quite accidentally. He is waited upon and ushered to his room by a large, fat, ugly, most unprepossessing female, who is the real chamber-maid, or under cook, or maid-of-all-work, who smells horribly of kitchen, and of that vegetable which would

certainly always smell the same, whatever name you called it by. He goes to his room disappointed and tired, and having eaten a very good supper, throws himself on the sofa, is soon asleep, and in all the contortions of night-mare, the horrors being very well represented and produced by a dissolving-view lantern.

These charades were declared two of the best ever done, and were much applauded. After coffee, tea, and ices had been plentifully partaken of, the curtain rose to an hour of as good amateur music as could be heard.

The next event was a dance at Thornbury, and certainly it was a very jolly one. Nothing like a country ball in a good house, with good music, lots of space, and unlimited champagne. It so effectually occupies for twenty-four hours—one hour dressing, five hours

dancing, six hours sleeping, and the remaining twelve to talk about it, rest, fret over your failures, or think of your successes, whilst your head recovers its proper equilibrium.

But when the week's fun was over Lady Herbert found it duller than ever, and became more severe upon the little twins, and more foolish in her pampering of her sweet Ferdinand. The injustice of his not succeeding to the title and estate at his father's death, as she considered it, was ever before her eyes, and her ambition blinded her.

She used to tell Julie she never knew of the law or of Rodolph's existence when she married.

She complained also to Julie that the nurse Batt became each day more unbearable, and questioned her closely as to whether she had

been gossiping to any one of their former life, "for indeed, since that theatrical party, and one day that I scolded her for listening at the door, she has appeared to threaten me, and, as it were, to insinuate she knew a secret connected with me—something I wish to conceal."

"Oh! no, miladi, you are only nervous. Do not think about it. I never speak to that horrid woman."

"Pray do not, Julie, and if she will not be quiet we must find means to get rid of her, and the children with her, between us; but be cautious, Julie, I beg of you."

They did not perceive during this conversation in Lady Herbert's dressing-room that the very woman they hated—Batt—was there, and heard all, having brought the twins to wish their mamma good-night, as usual.

She treasured up every word of what they said, and made a grand story of it to Brown in the evening, declaring that neither her life nor that of her precious babes was safe with her.

She had not been invited to see the acting, and though one evening when they had a rehearsal for the servants she might have gone down, Miss Rosa was restless and unwell, and she would not leave her room, so she never heard anything to show her the history of the depravity of the drawing-room conversations she had overheard.

## CHAPTER VII.

### WHO IS DROWNED?

AFTER a week such as they had just been enjoying at Thornbury, how doubly trying and melancholy does trouble seem, and yet how does it seem to choose that very occasion to visit us.

Perhaps it is just then a merciful Providence sees we require to be recalled, to

be drawn closer to Him, for, to our shame be it spoken, trace all alike, whatever our creed or practice, in prosperity we are prone to neglect God, and forget all good and success comes from Him, and by His dispensation alone; but when sorrow comes we remember that He alone can remove it, and we then fly to Him; and many a good, practical Christian may trace their first serious thoughts to some sorrow.

One day, a fortnight after all the festivities at Thornbury, a panic was spread throughout the whole house by the news that there had been an accident.

A messenger from one of the farms close by the river came up to the hall and asked to see my lord. He was out, so after a great deal of unnecessary noise and mystery, he informed the butler that the children were all

drowned, and that ere foreign woman with them.

"Oh! lud, sir, do come and get 'em out; it is so awful to see 'em all a drowning."

Lady Herbert happened just to be passing through the hall, and catching the last words, she said—

"Drowning! Who? What? Not my Ferdinand. Oh! Heavens, where? Run! save him!"

Down she rushed towards the river, followed by the butler, at the pace well-behaved and well-fed butlers are accustomed to go when ordered to hurry, and the farm messenger saying—

"Yes, yes, please, miladi, I left 'em all a drowning."

But they had not gone far when they met the bonne Julie, with her clothes wet through,

drenched to the skin, carrying Ferdinand, perfectly dry and safe, and dragging by the hand little Rose, who was crying enough to break her heart for Rodie and Mama.

Lady Herbert seized her child in her arms and turned towards the house, whilst Julie commenced dreadful howling and jabbering French and English with Spanish at intervals.

"It was not my fault, miladi; *Je jure, ce cher ange a tombé dans l'eau*, we were all on de rocks together, and we collect shells; *n'est ce pas*, Miss Rose?"

"I want Rodie, Julie killed my Rodie," she continued, crying.

By this time the news of the accident had spread throughout the house. Amongst those who came from the Hall with anxious faces and eager questions was one figure in a white dressing gown, her hair all streaming in the

wind, her face pale, her eye bright with fever, her footsteps tottering, her only cry was—

"My boy, my Rodie! where is the child?"

Little Rose on seeing her, broke away from Julie, and passing every one else, clung to her, and cried—

"She's killed Rodie, he is in the water, nurse, come and take him out."

The consternation, confusion, and fright was at its height, when Lord Herbert himself appeared. Having ascertained the cause of it all, though with some difficulty, for every one spoke at once, and all Lady Herbert repeated was her satisfaction Ferdinand was safe, but she must hurry in, for the darling was quite upset with the fright, and as to what was the matter she could not understand, away she went; at last Lord Herbert under-

stood some accident had happened to Rodolph, and he hastened down to the river to see what was to be done, desiring the butler to make the servants return to the house and put Batt the nurse to bed again.

The history of it all was that Batt had had a violent attack of bronchitis, and had been confined to her bed for a week; during that time her precious Rodolph and Rose had been obliged to join Julie and Ferdinand in their walks, but they had generally been accompanied by a young girl who was nursery maid to Batt.

Julie resented her presence as that of a spy, she was always persuading the children to ask permission of mamma to leave Ellen at home. On this occasion, Lady Herbert had consented; they said Ellen was tired, and without Mrs.

Batt knowing anything of it, Julie undertook the charge of all three, and took them down to the water.

They wandered along some way on the stones and banks, picking flowers, and building houses with the stones.

The stream was very rapid, and the river a large and dangerous one, with rocks more like the sea shore. In one part the rocks overhung the river, and below formed quite a bed, over which the water flowed and receded with great strength. On this upper rock they sat down, the two elder children climbed about, and Julie sang to amuse Ferdinand. She was startled by a cry from Rose, saying, "Oh, come and take Rodie out, he is all in the water!" She looked, and indeed he was in a dangerous position, though still safe. She called to him to come, but he, in childish

bravado, laughed, and said, "No, me quite safe, and having such fun in the water."

The poor creature was quite alarmed now, and did not know how to go and fetch him, encumbered as she was with Ferdinand, however she placed Ferdinand as she hoped in a safe position under Rose's care, and after great trouble, many frights, tearing her dress, and getting very wet, reached where the child was, but he dared her to come on, and ran further in towards the river.

She had just got close to him when a cry from Ferdinand made her look round, and let go his hand a moment, this was followed by a scream from Rose, "Oh, Rodie! Rodie come back," and when Julie looked back he had slipped down and was fairly in the water.

At that moment a farmer man passed on the bank high above, and desiring him to go and

get help, Julie, with considerable difficulty, got back to where Rose and Ferdinand were waiting.

"Oh, *Mon Dieu!* what will become of me, they never will save the child, they will say it is me murdered him. Well, at least *mon ange*, my Ferdinand, will be a rich lord, and miladi will be so pleased," with a mixture of satisfaction at the consequences of the accident, and trusting for her own safety to the impossibility of any one saying she had pushed him or run any risk for Ferdy she did not for Rodolph, she smothered her fear of punishment, and reached home wet as we have seen.

Lord Herbert immediately got help; guided by the one witness he found the spot; but alas! all that was left of his child was his cap and a toy boat he had been sailing.

Every one said the stream was so strong the boy would be carried right out to sea, no chance of ever seeing the body unless it were in the summer when the river was dry.

Sad indeed did poor Lord Herbert feel, as he returned home, and how he thought of his dear lost Rose, and her last injunction to watch over the boy. He reproached himself with ever having married again, since it had made him careless about her children and seemed to blame himself as if he only had caused the accident.

When he got home he was met by Lady Herbert full of her delight at Ferdinand's safety and making excuses for the maid Julie. Not one word of anxiety did she express for Rodolph; she asked if the child were found, but in so careless a tone, without even waiting for an answer, that Lord Herbert turned

from her impatiently, and shaking off her society went straight to his eldest children's nursery.

His visits there had lately not been very frequent, and more than once the Nurse Batt had complained of it, and even given very broad hints to her master that he no longer cared for his twins.

On entering the room little Rose jumped up from her tea table where Batt, pale, weak, crying, and only half dressed, was trying to console her, by abuse of Julie and the worst predictions for Rodolph's fate, and to persuade her to eat.

"Oh! papa—papa dear, where is Rody, he will be so cold all night in the water, get him out and I will love you so."

He took her on his knee, his tears fell as fast as hers, he sobbed convulsively, till

Rose, frightened dried her own tears to console him—

"Don't cry papa, oh! don't, mamma will scold Rose and say she teases papa, like she does when Ferdy cries; but I don't tease Ferdy, papa, only he will take my doll, and break her nose."

"Hush! my pet," said the broken-hearted father, "Ferdy shan't touch your doll, go to bed, and we will find Rody for you to-morrow. Batt," he said, turning to the nurse, "this is a very sad accident, and I am afraid my boy is gone to join his sweet mother up above."

"Master don't call it accident, because it ain't one, it's all that vixen Julie. She's murdered my darling 'cause he stood in the way of Master Ferdy."

"Batt, I forbid you such language. This

is a sore trial enough to me, do not aggravate it by annoyance to your mistress," and he left the nursery after once more kissing his child.

Lord Herbert, to all appearance to those who knew him as an acquaintance, remained the same person as he had hitherto been, but in truth he went from that room an altered man. The sad events of that day had changed him. He for the first time saw how often and how far he had forgotten his loved lost wife's dying direction to watch over and protect her boy. He reproached himself for having left the children so often unnoticed. But what tried him most in the whole accident perhaps, was that he had seen his wife, his handsome, captivating wife for the first time with an expression on her face of ambition, of triumph that almost frightened him. It was evident

that she only thought of the fortune and position of her son, and could not even grieve in appearance for the accident which had removed the stone in the way of her Ferdinand's succession.

He seemed at a glance to see all his poor little twins had had to feel, how engrossed Lady Herbert was by ambitious prospects, and almost felt at last his son had been mercifully taken from him, and from a course of hard-heartedness and neglect that he would perhaps scarcely have been able to counteract. From that day Lord Herbert and Rose became one and the same in every project, in every amusement. He made himself a child with her to play and amuse her each day; he took her out on her pony; he had her in his room before dinner to tell her stories; he taught her to read; he joined her

in her walks; indeed, even Batt could on longer complain that master forgot his Rose.

"Well, Mrs. Evans," said Batt one day to the housekeeper, "I thought that accident to my young master was a thing as how I never could have survived; and I says to Brown, 'I'm a wreck, so now I release you; go and get another sweetheart. I never shall recover my spirits like;' but Mrs. Evans, the Lord knows best; and the accident has had that merciful effect on my master that it's downright astonishing; he is a pattern father now, and he has given a something to them new nurseries by coming there so constant, that I declare I would'nt change 'em now not for ever so."

The news of the accident at Thornbury spread throughout the county, and every one passed their judgment upon it. Some blamed Lord Herbert, some ventured to insinuate

Lady Herbert knew more about it than she cared to own to.

As the body was never found there could be no inquest or inquiry, though many people insinuated there should have been, and that had the same happened to some less powerful county magnate there would have been one.

Lady Herbert went into deep mourning, they went out nowhere, and yet everyone said it was all mockery; the child's death had been determined upon by some at least of the household for some time past, and very happy for the poor thing he was gone before he grew older and knew his position better.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE PROPOSAL.

THE result of the week at Thornbury was, of course, as it should be, acting love with a homœpathic dose of the article imbibed before hand, ripened into a very decided alliopate dose immediately after. But it was destined to be well shaken before taken, with every other possible disagreeable condition for its well being.

There is an old-fashioned notion, not yet fairly washed away by the second deluge of fashion and custom, though it bids fair to be so soon, that theatricals amongst ladies and gentlemen must needs end in intimacy, romps, bad manners, flirtations with younger sons, and pretty girls carried so far as their actually expecting to be allowed to be married to each other with all due pomp and ceremony, nay even worse perhaps than that —an elopement; but I really think I am in no danger of an action for libel when I call it an old-fashioned notion, unless indeed on the principle laid down by one of our great modern judges, "The greater the truth, the greater the libel."

We are all indignant now at the bare idea of not being in fashion, of wearing anything old and *pasée* in our clothes; why not equally

so in our notions and opinions of society; let us discard our old maxims on such subjects as really are fashion, as much as our bonnets and the make of our dresses.

Certainly, if we are to believe all a certain weekly contemporary most cleverly describes as the girl of the period, it might alarm us; but after all, as Rome was saved in a critical crisis by the cackling of geese, why should we feel ashamed that many men are saved from an imprudent match by the girl cackling of the period. Rouge, paint, and enamel may give timely warning of the vanity and falseness within.

However, we diverge from our first subject.

There is one point on which I agree. Theatricals produce intimacy, you become intimately acquainted with each person's temper,

good or bad, nearly as certainly as you do after a few matches at croquet.

There is something very trying in the friendly advice vouchsafed by any one who has happened to act a little oftener than yourself, if a woman gives it to another woman, of course it is downright intolerable, viz.:—

"Excuse me, dear lady, I am sure you won't think me rude; but you know what a paid audience is—you must really come forward there, and be more enthusiastic."

"My dear, I only know what people in real life do in the society I've been accustomed to, and I'm sure if a man proposed that way to a girl, and wanted to kiss her hand, she would not think of fainting in his arms before every one; she would go to her chaperone."

Then the lady who is managing, and trying to push on rehearsals and get some spirit into the second parts, shrugs her shoulders, and in confidence applying to the leading man, whispers to him—

"Did you ever see anything so vexatious? Behind the scenes I can do nothing with Lady B.; she is for flirting, fainting, or anything else in a small way, and the moment I get her on the stage, she is as prim as my great-grandmother—a perfect stick."

"Oh, Mrs. H.," says Lady B., "pray come and show me what I do here; you have acted so much, and are so accustomed to the paying audiences, I feel quite out of my element and shy."

"Well, if you feel shy, of course you are out of your element; as to my acting so much, there perhaps we are quits, only I gave a

public play-bill with mine, and yours was all done *en confidences intimes.*"

And so they go on my dearing each other, whilst boiling over with jealousy and determined to go their own way, and take no advice, till at last each weak point in temper becomes well known to everyone concerned, and no man who proposes to a girl at the end of a week of rehearsals and acting can say he did not know it, if she turn out to have a temper.

One lady says to the manager—

"May I be allowed to say one word?"

"No, hold your tongue."

Then a husband and his wife—

"My dear, how badly you did that part to-night."

"Did I? how sorry I am; I really did my best."

"Then why the deuce did you do your best?—don't again."

These are a few specimens of the speeches made. However, the result of the week at Thornbury was very satisfactory at Sinclair. Mr. Seymour had formally proposed to Miss Belinda Sinclair, and everything seemed likely to end in a happy marriage; all parties agreed it would do very well.

Lady Evandale attributed the whole success of the match to her own charms. "You see," she would say, "once get a man really to appreciate a girl's connections, and to find he is *bien placé* with her relations, and half the battle's done."

Lord Evandale said it was all owing to his having kept that fellow Howard at a distance —poor dear old fellow; the manager's name not being in the play-bills, he never discovered

he was behind the scenes, and the great promoter of it all.

His name was not in the bill for two or three reasons. One was that he was on sick leave with a friendly doctor's certificate; another that certain little suspicious bits of paper in the market made a subdued light the most artistic for him just now; next, his last flirtation at Brighton races had been taken in earnest, and the girl actually expected him to speak to papa in that most alarming of forms, an after breakfast interview in the library. He protested he had just got orders for India, his father was heartless; he was moving heaven and earth to manage an exchange; finally, that the moment things were a little settled, he would write and return to his allegiance. Meantime he remarked to his own fellows: "It was a curious fact, and a damned

bore, poverty, debts, and no expectations were not the least protection to a man in these watering places. Believed the girls were determined to have a certain number of offers in a season, and of course a fellow could not risk being the one she had made up her mind to accept—very absurd."

Emma Sinclair laughed about her sister's love affairs, and said it was great fun to see how spooney they both were.

Everyone was in spirits, everyone forebode good of it excepting two, who were for ever croaking and shaking their heads.

One was Mrs. Batt, the nurse, who had recovered her health, and with it her spite seemed strengthened. She sometimes even threatened, and talked as if she could prevent the marriage. Her fellow servants paid but little attention to what she said, and ever since her

illness and the loss of Master Rodolph, she had been a little affected in her mind. She would sometimes go on so wildly—accusing Lady Herbert of murdering him, of being false to Lord Herbert, of having a secret league with Julie, and much more of such stuff. Even her admirer, Brown, the gardener, seemed now half afraid of her, and he talked seriously of going to London to better himself, and prepare a home for his Batt, though the last suggestion generally produced a titter amongst the other servants, and Jemima, the scullery maid, who had for some time tried to fascinate Brown, when he brought in the flowers, &c., for the dinner table, would always add with a sneer, "Mr. Brown, you are right, I mean to change soon, as the French say, we must '*Marché tout jours.*'"

The other croaker on the subject of the wedding at Sinclair was Miss Selina Bright, the old maid of the village, who was some day to marry the doctor, when somebody would buy his practice.

Miss Selina Bright lived in a neat little cottage at the corner of the village of Cornbury, exactly half way between Sinclair and Thornbury, and was so situated that from her drawing-room window she could see whoever passed to or from either park, everyone who came from the railway station to the town, and everyone as they passed to and from the parish church—so her means of information were ample and were well cultivated.

She had written to an old friend immediately after the theatricals, saying how dreadfully they were all going on at Thornbury; instead of amusing themselves as young ladies

and young married women did when she was brought up, they were acting love scenes all day long. The young ladies were left without any chaperones; they amused themselves painting scenery, like common house painters, got up ladders, at the risk of their lives, and when their friends admired the room and the stage, actually boasted they had sat up half the night to finish it in time.

No good could come of such familiarities, and as to a good marriage she ventured to say it would never lead to that. She owned she was amused, and spent a pleasant evening, but she took care not to express either to any one, for though she could not be singular and refuse to accept the invitation, she would not be supposed to approve of such doings for the world.

After expressing these opinions in her confi-

dential letters as well as to her friendly visitors of an afternoon, she, of course, was much astonished at hearing the news of Miss B. Sinclair's engagement from Dr. Watson one day, as he returned from Sinclair, where he had been for some time daily in attendance on Lady Evandale, whose health was so provokingly good and uninteresting, that no one else could be found to make out the least excuse for her to wear her pretty morning toilettes and receive her visitors in her boudoir, declaring she was never tired with any amount of London gaiety, but somehow country society was so very fatiguing. She really believed it was the preponderance of female conversation and the monotony of going to church every Sunday, and always hearing the same preacher that knocked her up. Then Lord Evandale talked so incessantly of his farm, and his boards,

and his local improvements, his drainage, and other useless common things, she was obliged now and then to take a rest, and get some of the officers from Edmonstone to come over and revive her and the girls with some fresh ideas.

"Well," said the doctor, as he alighted from his little four-wheel phaeton, "and what do you think is the news, my dear Miss Selina."

"Tell me, dear doctor; don't try my nerves by asking me to guess. I'm not equal to it," she simpered.

"Then it is this, Mr. Seymour has proposed to Miss Belinda, and the marriage is to take place as soon as possible, and gives satisfaction to all parties."

"You don't really mean it, dear doctor. Well, no good can come of that marriage, a wicked combination of flirting and play acting;

however, I wish them joy, and I'll go up to the hall and congratulate Lady Evandale to-morrow afternoon. I can't go to-day, because Sarah is altering my bonnet according to the last *Follet* I got from London," said Miss Bright.

"That's right, dear Miss Selina, I knew you would feel really glad and like to know all about it one of the first. Do get your bonnet done, and walk up to the hall; I am sure a little of your cheery talk will do my patient good, she wants society, I mean the society of sensible women," and so saying, and waiving a most tender and romantic adieu to his *chere affiancée*, the good doctor resumed his position in his safe four-wheeler, and went home to a good luncheon, and the hopes of an afternoon patient.

One of the remedies Dr. Watson was fond

of recommending to Lady Evandale to improve her health and state of nerves was quiet conversation with some female friend of congenial tastes.

"Now, milady, what you require is repose, and to be entertained and interested by the conversation of some one who takes all the trouble off your hands, if I may use the expression, talks for two, and always tells you something new and something rendered interesting by the accuracy of the facts, and of all having happened in your own circle, and I could, if allowed, suggest such a friend to your ladyship."

In this way did the doctor introduce his friend, Miss Selina to Lady Evandale's notice, and sometimes she succeeded in penetrating to the boudoir, but most decidedly when she did so her Majesty must have had some very

important military tactics in hand and required very close attendance to barracks at Downham, as well as from her guardsmen.

Miss Selina constantly walked up to Sinclair to enquire after the family, and constantly heard they were not at home; but on this particular day after the news she had heard from the doctor she determined to allow of no delay, and hurrying on the arrangement of her bonnet, she set off to congratulate the family on the auspicious event announced.

Perhaps the idea of a wedding—always a very popular one, and calculated to promote mirth and conviviality for the lookers on, whatever the interested parties may eventually find it produces,—I say perhaps the idea had made the servants gracious and pleasant, at all events Miss Selina Bright

broke the line and was introduced in due form to the drawing room.

When Miss Selina had recovered her equilibrium, first from finding her two gloves did not match, one being grey sown with white, the other with lavender sown with black, so very unlucky, to congratulate on a wedding with black in one's glove, and also from tumbling up the stairs behind the pompous butler, she found herself not in Lady Evandale's presence but actually making a third with the affianced couple.

Attempting some apology she was anxious to back out at once, but Miss Belinda jumped up in a moment, and running off insisted on finding her aunt, and rectified the mistake by returning to usher Miss Bright into Lady Evandale's boudoir, where if talk and gossip given without any return was the remedy re-

quired for Lady Evandale's complaint she must have been quite well when Miss Bright took her departure an hour later.

"Have a cup of tea? well really you are very kind, Lady Evandale, it would be pleasant after my walk, and promotes conversation they say. Ah!—oh! yes, indeed very sad affair was it not, poor thing the man was to blame, he neglected her to. Of course she went off with him and left six children. Ah! yes, she was always very gay as they say, fond of dancing, private theatricals so on; yes, poor thing, but talking of acting, I congratulate you on Miss Sinclair's engagement, such a nice young man. Yes, and everything so agreeable. Yes, I am so glad, and the doctor he really is so excited about it, quite nice to see him. Very soon take place I suppose; by-the-bye, Lady Evandale,

did you hear, very shocking was it not, that poor old Dame Smith in the village, burnt to death, all through wearing crinoline such a notion wearing crinoline at seventy. I told her it would be so, just as if people at her age required to be in the fashion; besides I hear crinoline is going out. You can tell me, I daresay, should one wear crinoline now in society, I'm going to a croquet party at the vicarage and I'm quite puzzled what to do, which do you recommend, crinoline or none. Oh! thanks, a medium sort; just what I said to my dressmaker to-day, but they are such a set of ignoramuses—never can help one."

And so Miss Bright rattled on, till at last, mercifully for Lady Evandale, the dressing bell rang, and off went Miss Bright with a page full of excuses and last speeches with

which I won't trouble you, for as they gave her hostess a fit of nerves and neuralgia that required her maid and no end of stimulants to cure, in case you have neither handy it might be a risk to repeat them.

The doctor, on his next visit, no doubt found his patient much better for the genial society.

The love making went on all the same in spite of the interruption, and if jealousy and mischief could have been as easily satisfied, and as easily made favourable to the match as Miss Selina Bright, our friends might have been spared many pangs and regrets.

Miss Bright went home pleased with herself and those she had seen, and almost forgot she had ever croaked about theatricals and the wedding, till reminded of it and asked in a mysterious manner how things were going

on by some of her neighbours, to whom she had before confidentially confided her certainty that it would never come to anything.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FIEND MISCHIEF.

SINCE the sad accident at Thornbury which had so suddenly and painfully awakened Lord Herbert from his egoistical habit of life, neglecting his children and his home because his horses, hounds, game, or politics attracted him elsewhere, he had altered his habits. That one glance at his wife's face, when instead of the dread of danger and affection

for his child he expected to find, he had only seen gratified ambition and the dark southern passions rising, seemed to have shown him his duty.

He now spent some hours each day with his children, took an interest in their first attempts at lessons, and often joined their rides and drives.

Lady Herbert had become more peremptory, more irritable, and was constantly referring to Ferdinand as the future possessor of Thornbury.

The two children had a nursery governess, and being thrown much more together became much attached and were constant playfellows, though only put together for studies.

Rose was not pretty, but was an interesting looking child with pretty hair and well made figure, and perhaps from the constant correc-

tion for the merest trifles which she had always been accustomed to from Lady Herbert, or from a naturally good disposition, she was no trouble to her governess, and had she not met with injustice would have never been in disgrace.

Ferdinand, who was a handsome, large dashing child with fine dark eyes, and lovely curling brown hair, was a thorough specimen of a spoilt boy, such as we read about, but fortunately in these days seldom see. He would not learn if he could possibly get out of it, and whatever part of his task could by any contrivance be done for him, he easily got Rose to do ; if she remonstrated upon it as deceitful, or not right, he would by persuasion and kisses, or if that failed by threats of complaining to his mamma and crying, soon get over her scruples.

Loving and associating with Rose soon of course led to loving and associating with Batt, and though her ire was as great as ever against Lady Herbert she loved children, and they became the greatest friends. This annoyed Julie, who complained to Lady Herbert that that woman was getting hold of Master Herbert and teaching him to hate her and his mother, and so worked upon her feelings that though Lady Herbert was much occupied with an amateur concert and ball to come off as soon as the first mourning was over, she at last got quite roused and determined to make Lord Herbert send the Nurse Batt away if possible.

Lady Herbert felt jealous of Rose's popularity with the servants, governess, and all who approached her, and she could not herself find anything really to blame her for, though

if Lord Herbert happened to be away for a few days poor Rose was certain to be punished for some imaginary fault, kept up in her own room.

One way or another she would often punish the poor child, and by threatening her if she dared tell her nurse, it was very long before it was discovered.

Lady Herbert always went up after dinner to see her precious Ferdinand whilst the nurses were down at supper, and if Batt or her charge had in any way annoyed her in the course of the day, she would look in upon Rose, and telling her she was a naughty little girl and the black men would carry her off, she would maliciously blow out the light left for her comfort by her nurse.

Rose had been left so much to the nursery and so unheeded that she had unfortunately

got all sorts of notions of black men and bogies, therefore anyone who has been a victim of the same childish terrors will appreciate the misery she suffered. On these occasions she would cry more than ever for Rodie, and indeed, this was one of her principal crimes in Lady Herbert's theory. She never could forget her Rodie, but often talked of him with tears and regrets.

Lord Herbert was grieved to see how things went on, but unwilling to separate Rose from her old nurse, he thought perhaps, an entire change of scene and place might do both good after their loss, and that when Lady Herbert found Ferdinand wanted a companion, and wished for Rose she would herself be anxious to have her back, and keep her at home.

One morning, to the great astonishment of every one, Lord Herbert announced that he

had engaged a very nice lodging at Brighton, and that Mrs. Batt and Miss Rose were to start the next day, for a month, to that place. Batt in her heart was delighted at the prospect, but she had not been consulted about it, which offended her, and therefore did not take the announcement very graciously, and put all sorts of difficulties in the way—not possible to get the child's clothes fit for such a place, not got a thing fit to wear herself, the clothes at the wash, and so on; however, when Lord Herbert gave an order, it must be obeyed; so next day they were packed and ready at the appointed time. Lord Herbert himself accompanying them; he was to return in a few days, when he had seen them safely established.

Nothing could exceed the pleasure and delight of Rose when she saw all the gaiety

and life of the Marine Parade at Brighton: she had lived in the country all her life, and was never tired of admiring the carriages and horses, and as to her first drive in a goat-cart the only thing wanting was Rodie—Ferdy she was sure would have been frightened and cried, and then mamma would scold her and say "it was Rose's fault;" and so unconsciously in her childish talk did she reveal the state of justice at home, and the sort of wary politics this baby was already obliged to adapt. Oh, what a lesson for Lord Herbert! What a twinge she gave him at each truism! No doubt, however, it was to him a wholesome lesson, and did good, but there was one who encouraged the feeling against mamma in the child at the same time she fed up and nursed her own revenge.

Mrs. Batt did not dare refer to the plan for

elopement with Lord Vincent she fancied she had overheard with Lady Herbert; nothing more came of it, and though she and Brown sometimes confidentially referred to it, they thought it safest to be ignorant—but with regard to Miss Sinclair's former marriage and all that little history, she was much more irate, and declared that that handsome Mr. Seymour should not marry her without a warning. "No, come what would she would speak to him, and let him know how he was deceived."

In vain Brown remonstrated, and said she wasn't their young lady, and "it was a hinterfering and a meddling into other people's affairs, which was a thing he couldn't abide, and she shouldn't do it."

Once away from Brown and left to her own judgment, she determined to write, and as she

meant it to be anonymous information, this seemed a capital opportunity; she knew a young man "as would take it up to London and post it there, so if Brown did hear of it, he never would suspect her."

However, she was mistaken in thinking Brown would occupy himself about her, for once removed from her sight, and out of her clutches, he fairly gave himself up to the fascinations of the kitchen maid, and soon gave warning to go to London and better himself.

When Lord Herbert returned to Thornbury he found Lady Herbert in a moody, irritable state, such as she had never shown to him before; she complained of feeling ill, said Ferdinand was dull, and they both wanted change—everyone said it was absurd to shut her up so on account of the death of such a

child as poor Rodolph—the servants were all complaining, and not knowing how to vent their spleen, said Master Herbert was so mischievous they could not do their work for him; the governess declared that now since his sister left he would not learn anything, and when he was found fault with said it didn't matter, Rose knew it, and she would tell him when she came back—such nonsense, as if Rose had ever been able to help him: no, they only did it to aggravate her, and she could not and would not bear it.

This and much more did she say, and accompanied with much stamping of pretty little feet and foreign gesticulations of all sorts.

Lord Herbert suggested she and Ferdinand should at once start for a short tour abroad.

"What without you?"

"Of course, my love; why not? You know it is impossible for me to leave just now, I have so many improvements on the estate in progress, and an election coming on."

"Then I shall not stir. No, real Englishman John Bull as you are, you may sacrifice your wife and child on the shrine of agriculture and politics!" said Lady Herbert, in her most cutting manner.

"But, love, I will engage you a trustworthy courier, and with him and Julie, you may travel, I am sure, anywhere in Europe."

"Then you forget," answered Lady Herbert, "I have engaged myself to sing at this concert for the benefit of some of your charitable institutions patronised by all your conceited country great guns; I am their servant for another fortnight."

"True. I had forgotten all we owe you

for taking it up so warmly, but I will make all arrangements for your tour immediately that is over."

"Well, I am not at all sure I shall be in the humour to go then, but I shall see how I feel; remember I may change my mind at the last."

"Of course, of course," said her too pliant husband, and they parted for dressing.

Thus did Lord Herbert humour, and try to please his hot tempered handsome wife, and thus did the two manage to jog on as quietly, and happily, as any one else, though indeed had Lady Herbert's ungoverned temper not met with as sensible and quiet one they could not long have saved a scandal. He understood her, and he loved her very dearly. He had lately been much hurt and disappointed that she seemed to care so little for his twins,

but after all why should she, he argued, it was her love of him made her jealous of the memory of his first wife, and if he had expected to have a quiet considerate gentle step-mother who would have cared for them as her own, he should have looked for some plain thorough going English girl, who had lost her first love and been brought up in a strict, uncomfortable home she was glad to escape from.

Now his wife was too handsome, too clever, too fascinating to be common-place and sensible. The thing would come by degrees. She was his *bijou* and his beauty now, and so he tried to forget what was wanting in her.

As to her foreign tour, he knew she would agree to that, and that probably it would set her up and put all on a good footing for some time.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE CHANGE.

Four months had passed since the proposal of Mr. Seymour to Miss Belinda Sinclair, and now at last the lawyers said the settlements were nearly finished, and the wedding was fixed for the following month—so that they would get away before Easter, and return for the London season. Nothing could suit better, and now began the trousseau arrange-

ments. Lady Evandale insisted that nothing could be done well out of Paris, so the good-natured uncle was induced to agree to a week spent there—taking the precaution of fixing a sum for expenditure, beyond which he positively said he would not go.

They set out for the week in the very best of spirits, and returned, having by their own account made most successful purchases, and so much cheaper than in London too, it was absurd. They, however, never calculated the journey and hotel bill in their account.

It is an old saying—"The course of true love never runs smooth." Now, the truth is, most running in this world is over a roughish path in some sense; as an ordinary member of society, there is rough work about money, or relations who are troublesome. In trade there are so many contesting for the same; in

religion, whatever you hold holy and wish to live up to, your neighbour considers folly and emptiness ; as to true love, it is so rare an article to be found in two people for each other, that no wonder the stones left on the path by one make it rough walking for both.

However, the path in love in this case might have run smoothly enough, only Belinda Sinclair was of so jealous a disposition that she was continually upsetting poor Mr. Seymour with suspicions and false accusations, and she had adopted a foolish notion—perhaps, from reading too many novels at the fashionable Brighton ladies school—that a little mystery hanging about a girl made her much more interesting and attractive. To effect this in her own case, she had, without the smallest reason, always forbidden Seymour to refer in

any way to her early days at Brighton; said the name of Miss Dale made her shudder, and that there were recollections attached to her school days she never wished renewed. The fact was, I suppose, she thought that a safe thing to hit upon, for no one knew anything much about her there excepting her sister Emma; and if Mr Seymour asked her about it the only answer he got was shouts of laughter. Emma, I suppose, saw what Belinda was about, and as she herself described it—

"I saw her little game, and of course wouldn't spoil sport." Then Belinda was of opinion that you spoilt all the fun of "going to be married," and "being engaged,"—if you did not bully the man a little and have some lover's quarrels. The consequence was, she flirted with everyone she met; had jolly

fun, and didn't mind how long it lasted. "Fancy," said she one day to Mr. Howard, "that dear Seymour is in such a hurry for our wedding day to be fixed. Now, I think this is the jolliest time I ever had; and married people tell me I shall never be able to treat him so after the fatal knot is tied. But I lead him a life now, sometimes I don't speak to him all day, because, I tell him, he looked too pleased with the handsome widow's dress, and picked up her fan too often. Then he is so penitent, and then, of course we make it all up."

"Oh!" said Howard, "I am glad to know the process one has to go through under the circumstances, though indeed a poor devil like me, nothing but debts and orders to India, is not likely to come under such circumstances at all events for several years, and then per-

haps the fashion will have changed, and they will manage them some other way."

"What nonsense you do talk, Mr. Howard."

"No, I don't; you know there are all sorts of new ways of taming wild beasts now, and they tell me there is a man who can make other men laugh, talk, walk, sing, or in fact do anything he wills they should. I certainly never heard of his making a woman do as he told her, but the science might be worth studying, and if the women could learn it you know one would be saved the trouble and foolishness of proposing to them."

"They would do it all by mesmerism, aye? not a bad idea, really," laughingly answered Belinda.

This plan of constantly working up a man's feelings and trying to make him jealous, is a

dangerous game, and so it proved with Belinda Sinclair.

It is a curious fact that though nothing beyond the common necessaries of life can ever be purchased at the country villages or post towns near people's country homes, yet you invariably find when the discussion of where we shall drive or ride to-day takes place at luncheon, some one always wants to go to the town, always wants to buy something, and strange to say, generally gets it, or something that does as well.

Then there is always one great attraction, the second post. So like everyone else, the Sinclairs generally rode in for the second post, and Belinda had been accustomed to see Mr. Seymour very much put out several times by his letters, and chaffed him much for being cross all the way home. They

generally turned out to be lawyer's difficulties and delays, the cause of it being a long minority, negligent trustees, several minor claims to be settled, old debts and so on.

However, on one particular day he got a letter which seemed to annoy him more than any he had had. Belinda found it was too serious even for chaffing, he evaded all her questions. She had been flirting all day, more even than usual with Mr. Howard, so she soon consoled herself by returning to that amusement, and left Seymour to himself and his moody thoughts.

The more he pouted the more she flirted, but she was surprised and rather put out that he did not return to his allegiance in the evening.

He came down late for dinner, after they had all finished soup, which she was

sure was done on purpose not to take her in, and the provoking young curate, who of course stood about, not knowing where to sit, as if he had never before been in Christian society, where people sat on chairs instead of squatting, eventually placed himself in the vacant chair by her side, which everyone else had left for Seymour.

He asked her to sing for him in the evening, certainly, but was so stiff, and melancholy she could make nothing of him. As he gave her the candle at bed time, she whispered—"What is it?" he answered, "I will explain in the morning, good-bye, and God bless you," and so they parted that night."

When the sisters went to their rooms, they talked over the day, and Emma fairly told Belinda she thought she was behaving beastly badly to poor Seymour, and though she did

not mind a little chaff now and then, the way she was carrying on with Howard was enough to make the sweetest lamb savage. Belinda pooh poohed the advice, and declared it was all right.

It was curious that good Lord Evandale, the moment his niece was actually engaged to be married, and according to his wishes, seemed to forget all his objections to young Howard, and never said another word about who was or was not to be asked to the house, but left his wife uncontrolled authority in such matters; and she, having been brought up in the vortex of London gaiety, with no guide but what was the fashion in men as well as other things, never dreamt of her nieces having the bad taste to want to marry anything but a good match, and in her choice of visitors never went beyond whether they

were entertaining, good-looking, and pleasant as a general rule, and two or three of the party good matches in a worldly point of view, the only point in fact through which she had learnt to view anything.

The morning after this ride to the Post the breakfast at Sinclair was gloomy and uncomfortable.

Lord Evandale had received a letter from Mr Seymour, telling him he was suddenly called to London, and would write further from there, but could not return at all events at present.

Lady Evandale never appeared at breakfast unless it were some special hunting breakfast, or a male occasion of the kind; her health was too delicate, she preferred it quietly in her boudoir.

Miss Belinda did not appear that morning

at breakfast, having been last seen crying bitterly in bed over a letter, which she almost tore to pieces in rage, and refused to show anyone.

Emma Sinclair declared the whole thing a horrid bore, and told the few men visitors who were in the house she believed there was going to be a tremendous blow up, and if they had any return tickets she recommended them to use them, and get into cooler quarters forthwith.

It was generally reported in the house that the marriage was off, or at all events postponed.

Mr. Seymour's valet had complained bitterly that his master never had been in such temper, there was no pleasing him; and the news from his lawyer must have been very unpleasant, for he had not spoken a word to

him, excepting telling him to pack up everything and follow him to town by the next train, he himself intending to go by the earliest one next morning.

These orders he had given him when he went to his master's room the last thing at night; and Mr. Brush firmly believed his master never went to bed at all, but walked about the room the whole night, and when he went to call him in the morning, he looked so white and ill, it made him quite anxious to get to London to him. However, in spite of this expressed anxiety, Mr. Brush, like all of his kind, lingered on, wishing good-bye and gossiping over the village news of the day till the latest train that could possibly take him to London that night.

When Brush did arrive he found his master

looking paler and more haggard still; he had evidently been writing a great many letters, and the confidential lawyer was just leaving the house; and thus he spoke aloud his thoughts as he hurried past Brush to his cab—

"Oh, these women! these women! Why will they not be open and truthful, and trust us!"

Brush received orders to be ready and start early next morning for Dover, whence they were going abroad, where or for how long Mr. Seymour did not inform him.

Meantime the truth was soon known at Sinclair, and of course spread also to the village and the neighbours—Miss Sinclair's marriage was off.

Lord Evandale received the following letter from Mr. Seymour—

"Dear Lord Evandale,

I regret to say I must leave England for six months; at the end of that time I shall return and marry your niece, if she still wishes me to do so, as I consider myself bound in honor to her till she herself thinks proper to release me. For all explanations I refer you to her. What I am suffering in what I am now obliged to do I can't tell you.

"Yours ever,

"SEYMOUR."

This letter fell as a thunder-bolt on poor Lord Evandale, who had begun to feel a great part of his promise to his brother fulfilled, and he should soon be able to rest quietly at home, and have no more balls or London seasons.

He immediately went to Miss Belinda's room, but was told by the maid her mistress was not up, said she was not well, and would speak to no one but Miss Emma, who was there with her, and would go down to her uncle in ten minutes, and tell him all about her.

Lord Evandale was forced to be content with this, and finding it impossible, in the interim, to attend, even to his morning visit to his stables, or give a hearing to his bailiff, thought perhaps his wife might be able to advise or enlighten him, for he said to himself: "these girls are such funny creatures, one can only get to understand them by putting on female spectacles in emergencies."

"Oh, Lord Evandale, how you startled me!" said my lady, who was becomingly tucked up on her sofa, waiting for Dr. Watson,

who had been sent for about an hour before, "really this news has so upset me, I feel quite nervous and ill."

"Then I fear my visit is useless, my dear, for I came to know what I was to do to-day, and what could be the meaning of this quarrel between Belinda and Seymour; I am sure they seemed very good friends yesterday."

"How should I know, Evandale?—it is hard to come and attack me; you must be aware whenever I tried to teach your nieces the way men should be treated, and instil into them some of the good London principles I was taught about marrying, you always took their part, said you hated manœuvering for husbands. Emma was frank, and open, and *naive*, you liked it, and as to Belinda, she had more sense in her little finger than most women in their heads—now you see."

"Oh, well, perhaps you were right. At all events I see you are not well enough to be bothered this morning, I will go and talk to Emma," and so the disappointed uncle retired and found Emma sitting in his study, waiting for him with a very serious look for her, and holding in her hand a letter very much crumpled and torn.

## CHAPTER XI.

### HIS DEPARTURE EXPLAINED.

"WELL, Emma, and what is the meaning of all this, explain at once," said Lord Evandale.

"First, my dear uncle, read this letter," and she put the letter Belinda had that morning received from Seymour into his hands.

After arranging his spectacles, shutting the windows and doors that they might have no

listeners, at last down he sat in his large business chair, and Emma sat upon the table, dangling her pretty little toes in mid air, and tearing a quill pen into shreds, as if that in some way mitigated the vexation under which she was evidently suffering.

The letter ran thus :—

"Dear Miss Sinclair,

You must remember you have often forbidden me to ask you questions about your school days at Miss Dale's, at Brighton, and insinuated some mystery attached to them which you did not choose to tell me."

"Mystery; school days; what the deuce does he mean?"

"Never mind, uncle, read on to the end,

and then ask what questions you like, but I shan't answer you any till you have drawn the covert well, and then we may together, perhaps, kill the fox."

The letter continued—

"This want of confidence tried me you know very much; yet, in spite of your jealous reproofs to me, and your thoughtless manner sometimes with other men, I loved you truly—so deeply I would risk everything to call you my wife—and trust to time to gain your entire confidence; but, judge of my feelings, when I got a letter on Monday, during our ride, telling me the real story of your school life, and all you had so often refused to explain to me. It is true my informant was anonymous, and I should probably have torn

up the letter as an unworthy suspicion of you, had not your own conduct confirmed it all; and your flirting that day when you saw I was suffering, tended to irritate me. I determined to leave you for six months, but at the end of that time—if you still wish to be my wife—Lord Evandale will let me know I am to return to Sinclair. I love you so dearly, I feel what I am thus obliged to do more deeply than words can tell; but after much consideration, I think it the wisest course to adopt as by that time I shall have tutored myself to indifference; and if we are ever man and wife, this is a subject we will never recur to; and the six month's absence will have served me, as Indian rubber does to our foolish, childish efforts at drawing—to efface all remembrance of your early life.

"Adieu, Miss Sinclair, may you never be loved less truly or devotedly than by your disappointed

"SEYMOUR."

"Well, my dear," said Lord Evandale as he dropped the eventful letter from his hand, "if when I draw my coverts in the hunting season, I understand as little about them as I do about that letter, I wonder they haven't kicked me out of the post of master of hounds years ago—that's all I can say."

"My dear uncle, it is very plain to me. The fox has gone right away, and we have all got a bad start, and if I'm not mistaken, we shall find our fences are stiff timber, and a soft, uncertain bank to start off from."

"Well, love, let's be serious; now what is all this?" said Lord Evandale.

"Listen to me, and I will tell you—first Mr. Seymour is one of those people who think you should tell each other everything when you are engaged, and still more when you are married. Now, I know that is a fallacy, and I have argued it with him over and over, and I told him married people on that principle would be awfully dull people, as an old Cumberland woman once said, 'Wary edyfying but wary dool.' However, that was his theory. Now, the second cause of uncomfort with them was, Belinda had said a married woman might flirt provided her husband were present, but that a married man must never admire another woman's dress or manner—when she was present—because it seemed as if he meant it as a reproof to her. Now, stop uncle, don't interrupt me, or the fox shall go to ground, and you shan't hear another word," laughed

Emma, as her uncle kept trying to interpose some word or question.

"I know what you want to ask about—why Belinda made such a mystery of her school life? The history is simply this: when we were at Miss Dale's wonderful *recherché* and fashionable school at Brighton, of course we walked out on the esplanade, and of course we could look at people and they could look at us. Well, there was a certain French Count, who was, no doubt, at Brighton for the good of his health, and found it necessary to walk on the esplanade at exactly the same hour we did. By degrees he got to notice us, as we thought, and in our silly way we drew lots who should drop their handkerchief, as if by accident of course, just as the Count passed. The lot fell to Belinda. The Count naturally picked it up

and gave it back to her with a low bow, a sigh, and '*Ah quel amour de fille!*' gently murmured."

"What folly, what neglect of Miss Dale—where was she all the time?"

"Now hush, uncle! I really won't tell if you excite yourself in that way. Naturally the joke could not end here, and you can fancy the Count was always at his post. One day he slipped a lovely pink note into Belinda's hand. You know we had all taken to bowing to him, and when the French teacher, who walked out with us, asked us if it was allowed, we said, of course; he was a cousin of a late pupil teacher. The pink note was carefully hid, and read with great caution at home by a select few, and what do you think it was—why a formal proposal of marriage. This was a little startling, and we

did not know how to settle that; so we took it to Miss Dale, and she undertook to answer it, and manage it should all be kept a secret. For the rest of that quarter we were not allowed to go on the Esplanade; of course, we teased Belinda dreadfully about her Count, and at last I fear we made it such a sore point that she could not bear it even referred to, and made me promise to say nothing about it at home.

"Now what we fear is that some servant, or some one who owed Belinda a grudge, trumped up a story on the foundation of this, and has so mystified Seymour that he believes it all. Here is the copy he sends of the anonymous letter:—

"'SIR,—I think marriage is a very solemn and awful thing to do, and it is right as far as

possible you should know the history of the one you ties yourself too for better and for worse. Now, do you know the young lady you is going to wed ain't a doing it for the first time; she is the widow of a French Count, as was believed—a swindler, as he proved to be—and has a child out at nurse somewhere. I heard her say all this was true herself, or I wouldn't have ventured to warn you.

"'A Lover of Fair Play.'

"Now, uncle dear, what is to be done next, that's the question? Belinda is furious, won't write to Seymour, and won't let anybody else do so: says all right, she can wait six months, and then she will marry him—and won't she lead him a life, she will pay him out, and all such rubbish."

"Indeed I am at a loss what is to be done; but are you sure, Emma, you have told me everything about this Count—did nothing else happen about him?" said Lord Evandale.

"No, I assure you; but you know it was impossible anything could: it made such a row in the school, and was only overlooked by Miss Dale on condition that we never spoke of it at home any of us, and the French teacher was scolded nearly to death."

"It is very unfortunate, you see; Seymour would never believe your version of the Count against the letter, on account of Belinda's mystery. Oh! if she had only told him all at once!" said Lord Evandale.

"Of course, but she said it was so absurd of him always questioning her, and would never do to allow. Now I am off, dear uncle,

I have told you all I know, remember, honour bright, you tell no one but auntie," and away she went back to Belinda.

Things remained much as they were for a week or so, those staying in the house took Emma's advice, and availed themselves of their return tickets. Every one looked depressed, every one felt afraid to refer to the past or talk of the future.

At the end of a week Belinda came out of her room; she looked somewhat harassed, but she joined the family party, declared she was quite well, eat and drank—we won't quite venture to say slept as usual—said she did not wish to mope, and begged her aunt to ask some visitors, for the house was too quiet, and she and they all wanted some society.

So everything seemed to be drifting back into its usual state inside the hall, but outside

amongst the neighbours, and especially in the village, curiosity and wonder had not half subsided. All wondered what had broken off the match.

Miss Selina Bright looked extremely knowing, and protested that she knew from the first the marriage never could be, she had prophesied it all along; no good ever came of joking with serious things, that playing at marrying, and rehearsing love making, treating such a solemn thing in such a flippant manner, couldn't bring any blessing with it—never it couldn't.

The servants examined the letters that came through their hands, insides or out just as it might be, were very attentive in answering the bells, and hanging about arranging the blinds, or poking the fire, but it was no use. Mr. Bow, the butler, told Mrs. Green

the housekeeper it was no use, he could make nothing of it at all. The two maids, my lady's, and the young lady's only sighed, and said it would be unbecoming of them in their confidential position to make any remarks, so they only said, "some mischief maker has been at work, and their arts has succeeded, and more's the pity!" though in truth they knew no more than the rest of them.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CRISIS.

For about four months things went on at Sinclair in a sort of quiescent state, the subject of Mr. Seymour and the expected wedding was forbidden; no one spoke of it and no one knew what Belinda intended to do when he returned, not even Emma, for she could not understand her sister's changed manner, she had become quite irritable and dissatisfied;

they had gone to London as usual, and gone out a great deal. Belinda not often staying away, it was understood by the world that the marriage was off for a time on account of certain money matters,and he was gone abroad to pass the time. Whenever Belinda went out, she insisted on keeping up a flirtation with Howard, which annoyed them all.

It was the evening of a large ball at the Duchess of Craven's; all London, that is the *élite* of London society were there, many had been the hard words said of the Duchess during the last week for refusing invitations to greedy applicants, and many the cut she had been forced into giving.

"She give herself such airs, indeed," said Lady Rossemore, "to leave my girls out of her parties—why, I knew her when she first came out a raw-boned red haired Scotch girl,

that the men danced with as a favour, and indeed it was at my house she first met the Duke."

"Is it not too bad," said Lady Louisa Mowbray, who had married a rich but vulgar cotton lord. "I wrote to the Duchess to ask for two of my husband's nephews to go to her ball, and she actually refuses to have them, I who am first cousin to the Duke and have known her all my life—too bad!" and many speeches of the kind were made to mutual friends and cordially responded too.

It is curious what continual gratitude seems to be expected by those at whose house a girl has first met any good match she may eventually marry; no offence seems equal to neglecting any one afterwards whose drawing-room was the first step on the ladder.

The ball was very brilliant, and graced by

the presence of royalty. Lord Evandale seldom went to balls, but on this occasion just went in and made his bow, and would certainly have remained and made himself very much *de trop*, could he have seen what was going on at the end of the conservatory, where some couples who found it too hot and fatiguing to dance had sat down to look at the flowers and sip iced coffe.

There was Lady Herbert with Lord Vincent in loyal attendance, and their *tête-à-tête* only interrupted from time to time by some impassioned youth who had been promised the next valse, and was actually green enough to fancy he was ever meant to have it.

Then there were others in whom we are not interested and not concerned; but one couple we are so far concerned with, that we must do the sneaky chaperone and listen.

"Believe me, Belinda dearest, you mistake him; he never loved you really, or he would not so easily have believed you in the wrong. Come, sweet love, promise you will forget him and love only me."

"Oh, don't Fred! pray don't tempt me! You know my uncle will never consent to my marrying you, especially now you are going to India."

"Well, and can you not love me enough to defy his displeasure for a week or two, for, of course, he would soon forgive you. Speak, dearest, speak—say, will you be mine: if you refuse I shall go to India alone, and despairing take to drink and gambling—which shall it be?" and he looked into her face with those speaking eyes.

"My aunt is calling me; let me go, Fred. I will see—I will try—I will answer

you to-morrow. Come, take me to my aunt."

Howard really thought himself desperately in love with Belinda, and fancied she was as much so with him. He had ascertained her engagement with Seymour was at an end. He had made up his quarrel and difficulties with his father, and persuaded him to pay all his debts on condition he exchanged from the Guards to the Rifles, and went out to India at once. That he was to do in a few weeks, and the height of his wishes was to take Belinda Sinclair with him as his wife. "With her by his side," he said, "a fellow might keep straight; and she was so different from most women." He knew Lord Evandale would not consent to his marriage, and his only chance was a run away; but after all, in these days that was nothing, sure to be

forgiven very soon, and saved all the trouble and expense of a wedding breakfast.

"The old parties ought to thank you instead of blowing up."

Since the marriage had been broken off, Lady Evandale had lost much of the influence she had gained over the girls, and she did not know how to remedy matters.

As the end of six months got near, Belinda became more reserved to Emma, more irritable and unlike herself.

One morning, just before they left London, and just when Lord Evandale was thinking of asking Belinda what sort of letter he should write Seymour—to return to Sinclair or not—the whole house was upset and in an uproar because Miss Sinclair was missing, and no one knew where she was gone.

At one of the distant parish churches of

London, the congregation had been appealed to by Charles Howard and Belinda Sinclair on three successive Sundays, to name any impediment they were aware of to their marrying. They had some of them, who were fortunate enough to hear what was muttered by the clergyman, thought of their friends, and not recognising the names amongst them, the thing was soon forgotten. However, after the third time of asking, as it is called, the clergyman had a letter begging him to be in readiness for eight o'clock next morning to join a happy pair. This request was an unusual one, and would probably have not met with much attention had it not been accompanied by a fee before hand, and the churchwarden having one at the same time begging all might be quiet, and a proper witness present with a fee also enclosed.

They arrived punctually, were married, and left the church for the Great Western Hotel.

Belinda Sinclair had written herself to Mr. Seymour to release him from any tie to her, and begging him to write to her and say he was satisfied. She entered into no defence of herself that she considered would be like; an admission of wrong when there was none, but she told him as he was aware of her jealous disposition, and how implicitly those who loved truly and meant to be happy should trust each other, and that if he was so easily persuaded she was deceiving him now, what would it be after marriage? therefore for both their sakes she wished their engagement to end, and she only waited for his answer to consider it so.

The answer came, and what else could it

be but a formal renunciation of his claims and rights; it was short, but showed true feeling, it was this—

"You are right, we are best free, and our engagement is at an end. The love that alone can make marriage happy should be so unsullied, so mutually confident it would be madness to expect sweet sunshine in a home where a cloud has already fallen, yet—

"'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all.'

"SEYMOUR."

Miss Sinclair did not show this or her own letter to anyone. She felt too much displeased with herself for her behaviour throughout to speak to anyone. She could not help feeling she had behaved in a coquetish foolish manner

and lost a man who would have made a really good husband; yet she would not own it. Oh! when are we ever so thoroughly displeased and discontented as when in spite of the thick veil of self love that we all draw over ourselves we see we have acted badly. Many a wretched, sleepless night had Belinda passed thinking of Seymour and what she had done. Many a good resolve she had made and many times determined to put it all into her uncle's hands to settle, but with daylight and a word with Howard all melted away, she was as reckless and heartless as ever.

Though all saw and regretted Belinda's way of flirting with Mr. Howard no one knew of Seymour's letter.

Her disappearance from the house three weeks after the Duchess of Craven's ball was like a thunderbolt.

Lord Evandale found a letter for him from the runaway, and one enclosed for Emma. Miss Sinclair told her uncle it was no use writing excuses, she knew she had done wrong and must be severely blamed, and after all his kindness she felt ashamed even of herself, but that she entreated him to be merciful in his judgment of her, and to remember how cruelly Mr. Seymour had treated her. She enclosed a copy of her own and his letter to show she was free from him, and begging forgiveness of him and her aunt, hoped they would see her before she started for India.

Her letter to Emma only appealed to her by all her sisterly love not to judge her harshly, and to use her irresistible influence with Lord and Lady Evandale that they should receive her before she left England.

Lord Evandale, of course, stormed and

raved for sometime, but Emma fulfilled her mission well, and by the end of a week Mr. and Mrs. Howard were reconciled and under her good uncle's roof again. There everything was done to ensure their comfort on their voyage, and on their arrival in India. The money Belinda was entitled to from her father at twenty-one was given up to her at once, and all most carefully and legally arranged, and every one tried to be as pleasant and cheerful about it as possible.

Lord Evandale could not, however, help often reminding his better half of his better wisdom when he so constantly warned her against letting that "fellow Howard hang about the girls." They remained in London to see the loving pair start, and then returned to Sinclair, where Emma found even her

everlasting spirits somewhat difficult to keep up without her sister.

Of course the breaking off of Miss Sinclair's marriage to Mr. Seymour had caused talk enough in her own neighbourhood ; but now the run-away match, the immediate reconciliation, the start for India, why the days did not seem half long enough for all the talk, all the exaggerations, all the advice, and all the would-be regrets.

Miss Selina Bright was naturally not very quiet on the subject, the only drawback being the absence ot the family from the hall, so that she could no longer quote what "poor dear Lady Evandale had said to her as a friend," or refer to the many opportunities the Doctor had of judging, though of course he never spoke of what he saw or heard through professional visits.

But she had one great croney in the village, a certain paralyzed old Indian officer, who having passed many years in India, was as fond of gossip, and as good a hand at it as any old maid; they talked it all over at their friendly tea meetings, and of course decided that it was very extraordinary a marriage so generally approved of should be broken off so suddenly. Mr. Seymour must have known all about his money matters from the first. Some people had mischievously hinted at a little actress in the matter, but that she knew from the best authority was a calumny, for her housemaid's sister had married Mr. Brush's brother, and as Mr. Brush had lived as confidential servant to Mr. Seymour ever since he left college, of course he was a judge, and he repudiated such a notion as quite unlike his master.

"No, it was really very odd; but then young ladies were brought up so differently now-a-days, there was no accounting for their doings and goings on."

When the news of the run-away match and the intended departure for India reached the county, then indeed it seemed as if no amount of talk or surmise could satisfy the feelings of the neighbours. Then Miss Bright and her Indian friend set to work in good earnest.

"Now who would have thought it?" said the interesting Selina, "Mr. Howard was at the bottom of it all, and of course he managed the anonymous letter, and upset the whole affair."

"Well, if I were the girl's brother, I'd like to horsewhip him within an inch of his life, and bang that out of him afterwards with a bullet," said the fiery colonel.

"Oh, how shocking you do talk; but what do you think, Colonel, of their going to India?"

"Why, ma'am I think this, that if a man take a real good, steady-going English girl out there, the chances are she becomes good for nothing in a year, if the cholera don't mercifully carry her off before; but if a man takes out there a girl that flirts and is a coquette in England, and has thrown over another man for him, why he is beyond even the mercy of the cholera, and must expect to have to keep her lover as well as herself."

This sentiment so solemnly given, and so emphatically spoken, quite overpowered poor Miss Selina Bright, and she became pathetic —wished the dear doctor would come and take his cup of tea.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### CHANGE OF AIR.

LADY HERBERT, though at first she seemed to look coldly on her husband's proposition of a foreign tour, was in reality quite anxious for it, and was only hesitating a little not to let him suppose her too soon appeased.

She and Julie were quite busy making preparations, and immediately the concert was over, they went off with Master Ferdinand,

who wished good-bye to his books and his governess in great triumph.

They stayed away a month, went to the South of France, and then through Switzerland.

Mrs. Batt and her charge, meantime, were left at Brighton, where they thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Rose began to forget her loss a little, and grew plump and rosy again. Mrs. Batt's only fear was news of Lady Herbert's return, and an order for them to do so also.

However, it did not come for some weeks, and Mrs. Batt did not lose her opportunities or her time, she made herself as captivating as possible, and dazzled by the dash of the tradespeople at the queen of watering places in comparison to her well meaning but countrified Brown, she fixed her affections

upon a butcher's foreman about to set up in business, and even Miss Rose was sometimes left to the care of the girl of the lodging-house, whilst she took a turn with her young man.

All this was most fortunate for the peace and quiet of Thornbury, and had Lord Herbert in his occasional visits to his child been allowed to look behind the scenes, he would have blessed the day he proposed the sea-side visit, as it would be likely to release him from a great difficulty; it was evident no comfort could exist at home whilst Batt and Julie were under the same roof, and yet he had not the heart to tell Batt she must part from Miss Rose. She would of course have resented such an order as an injustice and hardship of the deepest dye, but she was now likely to take a very different view of it, it

suited her to change the nursery for a shop, and Miss Rose for a husband, and like all servants, directly it suits them the thing must be done. After all I do not blame them, and though it is our habit to consider ourselves as generally ill-treated by our servants, I believe under similar circumstances we should be just as selfish. They have their way to make in the world, in some degree ours is made for us, so we must allow they deserve the preference in questions of going or staying as to time and place.

Great astonishment had been spread at Thornbury by Lord Herbert announcing that Lady Herbert when she returned the next day would bring with her a little girl, a year or so older than Master Ferdinand, for whom a room was to be prepared, who would be educated

with his own children, and would be considered as such; her name was Florence Gonzalè.

Batt and Miss Rose had returned the day Lord Herbert gave this order.

"Oh," she said, giving her face the most contemptuous expression she possibly could, "some more of them foreigners coming to turn the old place into a Bedlam. Well, I can't stand bye and see such goings on and so I mean to give warning."

"And no loss neither!" said Mr. Screw, the butler, who was sweet upon Mdle. Julie, consequently not over fond of Mrs. Batt.

"I may live to pay you for your impertinence, Mr. Screw," retorted Mrs. Batt, "leastways I never was thought slow at paying my debts, especially them sort," and she bounced from the room.

Lady Herbert arrived in due course, accompanied by Julie, master Ferdinand, and the strange child—a little dark-haired, brown-eyed gipsy-looking one, merry as a fairy, quick in all her movements, intelligent, and altogether fascinating, though just as you felt pleased with her, and thought you knew and liked her, there was a cunning twinkle in her eye and a sneer on her lip that seemed unnatural in one so young, and gave you a feeling of fear of her, quite unaccountable in such a child.

Lady Herbert looked handsome and better than ever, and was in one of her most pleasing moods—her foreign tour seemed to have done her good.

Ferdinand rushed off with Florence to show her his room and her room, the gardens, the ponies, the toys—in fine, everything in the way only children can rush about and see

everything in five minutes after they arrive at a place, and with that happy knack, that going away for a month gives perfect novelty to every object on their return, and makes every toy as good as new, if ever so defaced and old in truth.

"But oh," said Ferdy, "you have not seen the best of all," after Florence had been rushing about in one continuous state of rapture, each pleasure seeming greater than the last, "they say my sister Rose is come home, come and kiss her, you will love her so." And away they sped to the other nursery, where they found Rose, and she and Ferdinand gave each other a good child's hug. Ferdy presented Rose to Florence, saying "here, Flo, here is your new sister, my dear old one, she learns all my lessons for me—ask her to learn yours, it is so nice and easy."

Rose and Florence looked at each other and stared; a stiff kiss and shake of the hands was all that passed. Were they destined to be friends or enemies for life—certainly the latter, if one looker on, Mrs. Batt, could have decided their lot. For Rose's part, she was so relieved to find Lady Herbert did not accompany them to the nursery, for she was terribly frightened of her, that she was soon as keen to show off her treasures as Ferdy. She had bought a few presents at Brighton, and picked up sea-weed and stones that were considered invaluable. In her presents she had not counted upon a new play-fellow, but she soon made up her mind to give Ferdy's new sister the little work-box she had reserved for herself, and gave it very prettily, though it was accepted somewhat ungraciously.

"Ferdy," she said, as they returned to the

drawing-room, "mamma said Rose was a naughty, cross girl, and didn't love her, and wouldn't love me; but I don't think her cross."

"Mamma does not like Rose; but you mustn't tell that, Florence, it's a secret," answered the child.

"You are not vexed, dear Herbert, I hope," said my lady, in her gentlest tone, "at my bringing Florence back with me, she seemed so dull and uncared for at Paris, I could not leave her."

"No no," answered he, hastily, "only it's rather awkward; how is one to account for her arrival?"

"Oh, say she is my niece, the daughter of a sister who died, and I have adopted her to bring up with my own;" and so the matter dropped with them, and Miss Florence soon

fell unnoticed by the servants into the same routine as the other children; but they saw many a sneer and smile on the face of strangers when she was pointed out as my lady's niece. There was a mystery about her arrival and her former existence that made them take a more popular, because a more questionable view of her. Why was she so dark? why did she seem so different from the other children? why was everyone forbidden to ask her questions of where she came from, where she had been before?

A few days after they all returned, Lord Herbert found Batt in tears, and little Rose in the greatest state of concern in consequence. Of course he was prepared for some new domestic row, and was trying to think how he should manage to stop them, when she managed to gulp out—

"Oh, my lord, forgive me, but I must go, I must leave you; he takes on so, I can't refuse him no longer."

The relief this announcement was to him is not to be described; he ascertained it was the promising young butcher who took on so, and his object now was to make Batt leave her place and be married at once.

"But how about Miss Rose?" he asked.

"Oh, my lord, she is such a sweet angel; she sees as how I am happy when I'm with my Johnny, and she is that good that I know, she'll settle quite comfortable with Ellen, the nurse maid."

And so the grand feat was accomplished. Batt was to leave, and Rose was not to fret.

Lord Herbert spread the news at once, and thought that now all jealousies and uncomforts in the nurseries would be at an end. He

forgot his daughter would still be there, another woman's child—a crime in the eyes of his wife not to be forgiven—but he trusted to his own guardianship—his own fancied quick perception of any injustice to secure her peace and happiness. Oh, how very little he knew of what a jealous woman can do—how impossible it is for a mother to feel the same for any other than her own child.

However, Rose was so good and amiable, that he never knew much of her trials. The nurse left, and Rose and Florence were put in one room under the care of Ellen, and shared their studies and their games.

"So Miss Sinclair's wedding is broken off," said Batt one day before she left, to the housekeeper.

"Yes, poor thing, I'm so sorry for her—a

dear nice young lady she was; why she was as anxious about my foot that time I scalded it, when them theatricals was going on, as if she'd known me all her life."

"Well, I don't hold with her at all," said Batt. "I've my reasons for thinking she deceived Mr. Seymour, and I think it served her right; just like that Brown, now—wasn't he deceitful. Oh! I do hate deception, and anything adone underhand like."

"You're right, there, Mrs. Batt. I always says if you have got anything to say agin any one, why say it outright; don't go round about and do it mysteriously. There was a young man I know was drove off marrying as nice a girl as ever you see, by another girl as was jealous of her, writing anonymous

letters to him to say his sweetheart gave all her wages to another young man that she loved better than him, and it was to a brother in difficulties, as couldn't be explained all the time."

During this speech Mrs. Batt had been getting alternately red and white, and at length stammered out—

"'Law! Mrs. Evans, how shocking.

"Yes, that's what I call downright mean, to prevent other people's happiness in that way," said Evans.

"Perhaps," said Batt, "she thought it her duty to warn him."

"Duty, nonsense! she ought to have been sure she told the truth before she talked of duty, but you look queer like Mrs. Batt, take a glass of my new orange wine, you

can't think how it revives you when your feelings is over tried."

With the assistance of this cordial and a little more gossip, Mrs. Batt felt better, and returned to her packing up.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE BRIDE.

About a year later than our last chapter of events, one bright morning in August, a neat little villa, in the village of Sinclair, was in a state of great excitement.

The church bells were ringing a merry peal, the little boys were waiting in anxious expectation of a lark. The fly from the Crown

came along at an unusually quick pace, the horse's head decorated with a favor, to match one on the coachman's breast; both had evidently assisted at many weddings before. What a volume one might make in one's imagination were one to follow the fate of each of the happy couples these white bows had done service for.

But this occasion seemed a very special one. It was no other than the long looked for, longed talked of marriage of Miss Selina Bright and Dr. Watson.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! Sarah Anne, how nervous I do feel. I am quite faint, and this dress will never meet; I know it won't. Miss Brown would make it stylish, as she said, to suit the great occasion."

"Law, m'am! don't think so much about it, it will soon be over," said the maid of all

work, for that day officiating as lady's maid, and dressed in her best."

"Now, Sarah Anne, don't mam me before my time, let me enjoy my freedom, my title of Miss, as long as I can."

"Oh! I should have thought you was tired of that by this, miss, but I beg your pardon. They say you never knows the value of a good thing till you lose it; that's what I said to my late mistress when she parted with me, all because I had John into tea one Sunday evening."

And so these two chatted whilst the last touches were given to the white silk bonnet and lavender silk dress Miss Bright had with great care selected for her bridal attire. A soft white tulle fall modestly veiled the blushing bride's face, a square of white net, with a

white satin border, put on as a shawl, completed this interesting toilette.

"There, now, Sarah Anne, I have split my glove; oh! deary me, what shall I do. The clergyman will think it so mean to be married in a torn mended glove—there, and now there's a pin running into me just on my shoulder. Oh! it is the one to keep my shawl straight; there now, I am off. Oh dear, how I tremble; I can't think how ever the brides I have seen could be so quiet and self-possessed. I never thought what an awful ceremony it was," said Miss Selina.

"I'm sure, m'am — I beg your pardon, I mean, miss—you have no cause to tremble going to be married to such a dear good gentleman as the doctor."

"Well, we shall come back here to break-

fast. Is everything ready? Don't overdo the chickens. Are you sure the jelly is set? ice the champagne. I wonder how those two Miss Smiths will dress—horrid guys, I dare-say."

Thus did Miss Bright, usually so demure and so careful in her domestic arrangements, wind up all her ideas in her agitation on this long-looked-forward-to morning. She was quite fussy.

"The carriage has come, miss—please are you ready?" said Sarah Anne, after she had spoken to the driver, and had a little joke upon his job.

"Yes—yes, I'm coming. Oh! love—love, what a naughty little tyrant you are!"

At last in stepped Miss Bright, amidst much cheering from the boys without, and a last injunction to Sarah Ann, "Mind, now

be sure that waiter cleans his boots well before he walks on the new carpet; mind he does not break anything, and remember the bread sauce."

"Oh, lawks yes, Miss, I'll look after it all."

"Now, driver, stop at Mrs. Smith's and pick up the two bridesmaids."

"Dear me! yes, I'd quite forgotten them. Sarah Ann, only think—

"Yes, only think how grand it will be to see you come back in the doctor's carriage a real Mrs.."

And at last away they went.

The two Miss Smiths who had been invited to be bridesmaids were nieces of the doctor's, and liked to be still called young ladies. There is one point upon which this usually somewhat ill-natured world is certainly kind and liberal, that is the length

of time they allow the name of young lady to be applied to unmarried females, and these were a specimen of this virtue, for the world called them young ladies, and they therefore had a perfect right to consider themselves as such, and dress accordingly, which they certainly did.

The fashion did not reach Sinclair quite so soon as it does Brighton or any other aristocratic locality, but what with the *Follet*, the Queen's Newspaper, and a stare at the county swells on their return to the country, the Miss Smiths generally managed to astonish the rest of the village society and attract considerable notice. I suppose that is after all one object in dressing, to have somethiug new, different from your neighbours, and something that makes every one look twice; then as one has always been taught second

thoughts are the best, one concludes the second thoughts are of admiration. The worst of admiration, especially from one woman to another of your dress is that experience, perhaps even from one's own feelings, has taught one that when people say "How very pretty — charming, so uncommon, &c.," it quite as often means the reverse. The fact is they find themselves obliged to say something to give vent to their feelings, they have once been attracted to you, and they can't say, "How ugly and un like anyone else," and have recourse to those fibs as commonplace and well understood as that of "Not at home," when you are sitting in your own drawing room.

On this occasion the Miss Smiths declined to tell anyone the dress they had selected for the arduous duty of bridesmaids. And this

is how they appeared. First I must tell you, not their age, because of course that is not known, nor is it likely to be, but I do know their mother died six and thirty years ago, and the younger sister always says she remembers so well her dear mother's funeral, and her pleasure in her new black frock, and that Jemima, that is Miss Smith *par excellence*, was a great tall girl, much older than her; but what I must tell you is their general appearanee. They were just five feet two in height; one was what is rudely called stumpy, that is, large head, feet and hands, rather *embonpoint*, square waist, and short legs—that was Jemima. Susannah was the same height, with a very long throat, very thin, and a very small head, small waist, long arms, and all the rest apparently legs. She seemed in fact as if she had been intended for

a tall, fine-grown woman, but that some sad catastrophe had one day stopped her growth and deprived her of all the filling out properties due to her, and given double share to her sister. Now these two sisters, so totally unlike in appearance, dressed exactly alike in colour, shape, and material, therefore it was not possible for the two to be set off to advantage the same day. But dear me! I forgot to describe their faces. Jemima had red hair with light eyelashes and the inseparable speckly complexion that gives you the idea of a badly printed spotted dress where the colour has run, all the bright colour is gone to the head, and the remainder can only show a generally watery tint; her mouth was pleasant and good-humoured.

Susannah on the contrary had very dark black hair, dark eyes, tightly-closed lips, and

looked upon the world as mistaken in its general notions, especially on the subject of dress and female beauty, so she endeavoured to express her general disapprobation of it in her countenance.

Their dress, then, for this bridal day was called after that beautiful new French colour, *pomme d'or*, which though it may be a somewhat striking shade to dress in, is a triumph in colours; but theirs, though you were bound to consider it genuine, was a bright glaring orange in some indescribable light material between a muslin and a barège. This skirt was looped up on each hip by being passed through a loop of scarlet ribband, with the end hanging down, just as they had seen Lady Evandale with hers one day in the village school. Now the history of that was, one morning walking with Lord

Evandale to point out some alterations she wished for, her dress was so much in the way as she marked out where the new wall was to be, that she pulled it through her sash on both sides, and so drew it up straight before and behind and left the length at the sides, where they did not incommode her. Under this orange dress they wore white *pique* petticoats, braided by themselves for the occasion, all over hearts and bows and arrows—cupids they thought would be too fast for bridesmaids.

Very long white muslin veils that hung down their backs, and obstinately refused to make any artistic folds, but fell or stuck out quite straight, were fastened on the top of immensely frizzed out *bandeaus* and chignons, crowned with a large crimson rose, and the breast and head of a scarlet bird with a long

pointed beak that just stood over their noses, as much as to say "Don't take liberties; it is out of fashion to kiss the bridesmaids as well as the bride." The head dress left you in a happy state of ignorance as to whether they had followed the now usual fashion of no bonnets for bridesmaids or not, until discovering some white satin strings tied under the chignon you concluded out of that compliment to the taste of the bride—they were bonnets. Now if ever Susannah could approach good looks sufficiently near for it to signify what colour she wore, this costume might have suited her. but for poor Jemima, or rather the feelings of Jemima's lookers on, the clash in colouring was too painful—shades of rhubarb, carrot and saffron floated before your eyes, or rather remained steadfastly fixed there, so that you could see nothing else, and many a witness of

that marriage must have suffered from nightmare that night, produced by imbibing too much orange, garnished with scarlet runners.

Poor Miss Selina Bright might well say they would be guys, and she would never have risked their presence at her wedding in so official a capacity in their own choice of dress, but Dr. Watson made such a point of their being asked, and as they refused to tell what dress they had selected, why she had no help for it. Judge of her dismay when these fair companions stepped into her fly.

However, once arrived at the church it was as Sarah Anne had predicted, soon over, and Miss Selina Bright returned to her villa the blooming, blushing bride of Dr. Watson.

They had a very merry breakfast, as it is called—luncheon it would be more reasonably designated. The clergyman, his wife, and

daughter—a tall, over-grown, awkward girl of seventeen—joined them, with about twenty of their mutual friends.

The doctor and his wife were to make a week's tour in Cornwall, and return to receive their friends' congratulations at home.

One of Miss Bright's especial horrors had been the new high church notions, and the clergyman who, for years, had enjoyed the benefit of the Sinclair Vicarage, was a real old-fashioned Protestant. No choral services, no flowers, no lights; in fine, as they call it, no nonsense was to be allowed; and so, indeed, it had been a short ceremony, and a very quiet, monotonous one—I suppose the right thing would be to say very impressive, that is, the vicar spoke very slowly and very prosily; asked those momentous questions to the in-

teresting bride and bridegroom very tenderly and carefully, as if, perhaps, they had been too hasty, and might yet repent; and the address, which he read out of the book as if it had been quite new and made for the occasion, he gave with great emphasis and pathos.

At the breakfast they, of course, had some toasts, some health drinking, and when the bride wished Dr. Watson to propose the clergy, it was received with great applause, and responded to by the rev. vicar, with many compliments to the bride, who showed herself such a true Christian and a real Churchwoman in her many good and charitable works, and in her affectionate attachment to the Church in its genuine simplicity, and not led away by any of the new-fangled notions of ceremonies and shows.

They all waited to see the bride start, and all parted with the pleasantest recollections of one of the cheeriest weddings the village of Sinclair had ever seen.

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE FIRST LONDON SEASON.

SOME years had passed—Rose and Florence had grown up together, the character now it was formed, of the two girls, was as opposite as was their outward appearance.

Rose was fair, with wavy hair and blue eyes that alone expressed love, sincerity, and intelligence; there was no actual beauty, but it was an inticing expression that made you

wish to see more of her. She was tall, with a slight and graceful figure, small feet and hands. She had grown up more serious than she promised to be as a child, but that seemed the natural consequence of the position she had been placed in.

Lady Herbert had never really attached herself to her, she could not help feeling to a certain degree drawn towards her, seeing how much she was loved by others.

Ferdinand's childish love for Rose had increased as he grew up; she was his first thought when he came home for his holidays, his confidant in all his troubles; and now that he was at the university he wrote to her constantly, he loaded her with presents; and he was always trying, when at home, to neutralise his mother's indifference by kindnesses and small attentions.

determination sooner or later she was nearly sure to carry it out.

This was a dangerous part of her character, and seemed to bid fair in after life to lead her beyond the laws of kindness and justice to her neighbour, and as a child often made victims of her brother and Rose, though she managed to screen herself, and was wary in her way of doing things.

They were now both introduced into society in the country, and were soon going to London for the season. There lady Herbert expected them soon to make good matches, but often in their presence would say cutting things about Rose, telling her that sort of naïve way of talking, that constantly contented and unambitious view of everything, would never take in London. Florence was

much more suited to the life they would lead there, and, indeed, she thought it would be much better if Florence went out for a season alone, as she could then be of use to her, and support her; besides, in Rose's delicate state of health she thought a London season a great risk for her, and were she her own child she would not bring her out for another year. But, of course, whatever advice she gave of that kind was put down by Lord Herbert and his friends as jealousy.

Poor Rose would remain passive, though indeed she writhed inwardly at the cuts she often got; she would say nothing till it came to an unjust insinuation against her father. Then she could not be silent; she must defend him. Then she was told she was impertinent and forward, and had better submit her opinion to those who knew more about

such things — why not be submissive like Florence.

Now Florence's submission was that of a somewhat sullen disposition, and all her irritation was kept for an opportunity of vengeance in some way by petty annoyances. She never forgot to pay a debt. The reference to Rose's delicate health was one of Lady Herbert's favourite ways of tormenting Rose.

It was true she had been delicate from the effects of measles the year before, and some indiscreet doctor had solemnly told them she had the seeds of consumption in her, that she would never reach the age of two-and-twenty, and she ought not to be allowed late hours or hot rooms.

On this subject Lady Herbert became very affectionate, and talked a great deal. She

was constantly reminding Rose of how young her mother had died, and how consumptive she always appeared, and that it was very evident she had inherited it from her.

She often talked of the wickedness of people who knew they had a disease of the kind that was always sure to be inherited, marrying; and the only excuse she could make for the Roman Catholic practice of nunneries was that she believed they made very happy and harmless homes for those girls who, for some reason of this kind, were not justified in marrying, and so perpetuating their misfortunes in their children.

By degrees all this talk, always mixed up with a great many affectionate expressions, and a great deal of talk of conscience and duty, had a great effect on Rose, and there is no doubt that a young person pre-disposed by

delicate nerves and the general debility so common with our growth, can be persuaded to almost anything, and the least little ailment they may have, by dint of dwelling on it, and having it always made much of, becomes sometimes very serious.

The neighbours used to say—

"What an excellent and anxious stepmother Lady Herbert had turned out after all, and how lucky Rose was to have anybody about her who seemed so anxious, and at the same time could take so cheerfully the responsibility of one so delicate."

However, Lord Herbert determined the two girls should be presented the same day, and should appear together in London, and the cousins were to be as much on an equality as possible, though another source of jealousy to Lady Herbert and Florence was Rose's

"Honourable" affixed to her name, and no parcel or shop order was ever allowed to be entered in her name to avoid the contrast.

Lady Herbert determined Florence should make so brilliant a match, she should rank far before Rose very soon, so meantime concealed the difference in rank as much as possible; and they both often passed as Lord Herbert's daughters, to her satisfaction, though people would sometimes remark it was curious Florence was so dark and unlike a Herbert.

They went, therefore, to London, and expected a very gay season. On the day they were dressed for Court, of course, as is the custom in all families, everybody who knew anything of the young ladies before, every old servant, and every friend in that rank wanted to see them, and the number

who came to stare was quite surprising. Amongst them was Mrs. Batt, the former nurse, now Mrs. Pringle, the mistress of a thriving business, and the mother of several small Pringles.

No doubt the humbug and civil speeches of one's friends in our own class of life are often very reprehensible and full of untruth; but I do think there are occasions when the truth need not be told, where health and sorrow are concerned; but certainly amongst the middle and the lower class of people, health and looks are matters upon which they are painfully truthful, and Mrs. Pringle carried out my assertion when she came to see Rose Herbert dressed for presentation at her Majesty's drawing-room.

"Oh law, my dear! you do look ill," she exclaimed; "whatever have you been doing

of, you are as thin as my girl Jane what's going off they say into a decline !"

Rose coloured, and her eyes filled with tears; but she answered with a forced smile—

"Oh, dear old nurse, it's only your fancy; I'm as well as possible, and if I were fat I shouldn't look at all well in this dress."

They went to Court, and as it is the custom to say of brides and young ladies' first presentation, they got through it very well, and it was not half such nervous work as they expected. The Queen did not say their hand was red, or too hot, or too cold, as she is reported to have done in her youth to many frightened maidens, and they did not tread on each other's trains, or do anything especially awkward.

When they came back Rose was exceed-

ingly tired, and being told she looked so, and had better rest till dinner, as they were going to a ball that night, she fancied she was really worse.

She went to her room, and having got rid of her finery, asked for some tea and a visit from old nurse.

At first Rose seemed scarcely at her ease with her; there was evidently something she wanted to say, and did not quite dare—at last she asked her very gently,

"Nurse, dear! do you really think I look ill? do you think I shall die? They say I shan't live till I am twenty-two?"

"Pooh, pooh, my darling, you are only a little weak; you will soon be well again; it's that wicked woman tells you that; the wish is father to the thought."

"Hush, nurse, hush! don't speak so, Lady Herbert has been very kind to me, lately, but she says I must not marry; it would be wicked of me."

"Don't believe her, my dear, it's not true; she's afraid you'll cut out her gipsy girl, that's all. You're as bonnie as any young lady in London, and fit to be a Duchess, and I hope you will, too."

"Oh, nurse! but if I am consumptive, and they say I am, I had better die alone, and not make anybody else unhappy."

Here they were interrupted by Ferdinand's voice on the stairs, and asking if he might come in, but he looked disappointed when he saw Rose was no longer in her court dress.

"I am too late! oh, I knew I should be! that horrid Eastern Counties, it is the very

slowest coach going. I tore off from Cambridge as soon as ever I got mother's letter, saying you were going to be presented, to see how you looked, and bring you a becoming bouquet, but the engine broke down, and left us in a cutting for an hour, and though ticketed to be delivered immediately, here I am, three hours behind time. Hang it?"

But he ran on "they have been writing me word you were ill, Rose, and probably would not be well enough to be presented. You are looking blooming," and he gave her a genuine brother's kiss.

"Ah! old nurse, you here too? that is jolly lucky; now, I want a button sewn on, and I want a good strong cup of tea, so help me to both; and how is Pringle, and how are all the little Pringles? I am off again in the

morning; only got away for twenty-four hours, just to see Rose?"

His merry talk and hearty manner drove away Rose's fears for the time, at least, and she appeared at dinner looking stronger, and was more cheery than she had been for some time.

Lord Herbert was quite in spirits, and they went off to the ball, intending to stay so late that it was best to take leave of Ferdinand that night.

"Good-night, Rose, you look as well as in our old nursery days; mind you catch a Duke, now? good-night, Florence, and merry ball to you. I shall see you, mother, in the morning."

He could not go with them, for, as his visit to London was accidental, and he had not yet

made any acquaintances there, he had no card, so he tumbled up to bed, wondering what they meant, always writing to him that Rose was so delicate.

END OF VOL. I.

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